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The Russian Spy; OR, The Brothers of the Starry Cross. BY CAPT. FREDERICK WHITTAKER.

CHAPTER I.

THE COSSACK CAPTAIN.

At the edge of the Eastern Steppe commences a gentle slope, which continues for hundreds of miles in a circle, and forms a vast bowl, in the center of which lies the lonely Sea of Aral, separated from its sister Caspian only by the plateau of Ust Urt.

On the eastern rim of this bowl is a crack, and through the crack runs the Syr Daria river.

And the Syr Daria marks the Russian frontier.

Here, on the day when my story opens, might be

seen a spectacle peculiar to Russia—fort, camp and church united in one, and all guarded by the faithful Cossack.

The fort stood on a little knoll near the river, commanding with its guns, miles and miles of desolate plain. Below it lay the camp of the Cossack, and in the midst of the camp rose the green dome and golden cross of the church.

No camp of frail tents is that of the Cossack, but a village of neat, warmly-thatched cottages, with well-kept gardens around each; the whole as large as many a populous town.

While the steppe to the north is still covered with snow, the southerly slope of Syr Daria Plain is already waking up to spring; and there are dark patches among the white fields, which grow more and more frequent, till a hundred miles further bring you to the plains of Turkestan.

The bell of the little church was tolling for the end of mass, and a small patrol of Cossacks stood by

their horses, when a mounted officer rode slowly out of the fort hard by, shortly after followed by the glittering figure of Gen. Grodjinsky, the commander of Fort Perofsky.

The general was in full uniform, with all his orders on, and cut a far more splendid figure than his companion, and yet it was observable that he treated the latter with marked respect. The person in question was dressed in the simple uniform of an officer of Cossacks, and yet there was a certain nameless air about him that implied one of distinction.

"I am much obliged for your offer of help, general," he said, quietly, as the other concluded a string of Russian compliments; "but I have determined to do these things for myself, without any assistance. The sergeant of the party knows the way, I presume."

"I shall have the honor of sending the best warrior of the camp with your—" began the general.

The young officer raised his hand gently.



"HOW I SHOULD LIKE TO TRY ONE SHOT AT THE CHRISTIAN DOGS YONDER! I COULD TAKE OFF THEIR LEADER SO EASILY. SHALL I DO IT?"

"Nothing but captain," he said. "I am Captain Blank, of the Cossacks of the guard, on duty here, that is all, general. Does the sergeant know the way to the next post?"

"He does, captain," said the general, soberly. "Then farewell," said Captain Blank.

As he spoke he waved his hand and shook his rein. His steed sprung forward with a bound, and carried him to the gate of the camp. As he appeared there, a gruff voice within shouted: "Mount!"

Then twelve Cossacks leaped on their horses like a flash, and a sergeant with a tremendous beard rode out of the gate and saluted Captain Blank, saying:

"We gladly obey your honor."*

Captain Blank looked at the grim sergeant and his wild-appearing escort with an amused smile. Then he kindly returned the salute, and asked:

"What is thy name, friend?"

"Sergeant Potapoff, at your honor's service," said the other.

"Then follow me, Potapoff, and the rest of you, my children."

And the young officer started at a gallop, followed by the hard-riding Cossacks at the same speed, and turned toward the open steppe to the north.

In a very short time they had passed the camp, ridden over the edge of the vast bowl on whose rim the fort was built, and were alone in the steppe, for the flag-staff of the fort was the only thing that remained visible to mark the Russian post, and that was fast disappearing under the land.

For some time Captain Blank rode silently on, the frozen snow crackling under the roughed shoes of his horse, keeping a steady course to the north-east. The sky that had been bright in the Aral valley, was fast growing gray, and gathering into dark clouds to the north, and a cold, damp wind came whistling past their ears.

Captain Blank slackened his pace, unstrapped his cloak and wrapped himself in it. Then he beckoned to Potapoff to come up alongside.

"What does that cloud mean, friend?"

"The last snow, your honor, and 'tis ever the worst."

"Can we go through, think you, to the next post, if it comes on?"

Potapoff wrinkled up his weather-beaten face and looked ahead.

The dark cloud was coming toward them very rapidly.

"We can, your honor," he said, gravely, "but—"

"But you think I am not able to face the same hardships," said the young captain, good-humoredly. "Well, Potapoff, you shall see. How long will it last, think you?"

"Three long days," said the old sergeant, gravely; "but your honor must know 'tis no common storm. The very wolves freeze to death, if it catches them away from their burrows."

"What would you recommend then?" said the captain.

"If your honor will let an old rider, who remembers the White Czar, speak freely, he would say, turn back till the storm is over."

Captain Blank looked at the old sergeant with a curious look.

"Whom do you mean by the White Czar?" he asked, disregarding the latter portion of the Cossack's speech.

"Whom but the blessed Alexander, whom the saints have in their holy keeping," said Potapoff; and he crossed himself devoutly.

"And the present czar, what is he called?" asked the captain, with a smile.

As he spoke, down came the storm in a whirl of snow-flakes, and snatched and tore at the cloaks of the horsemen, while the spirited little horses snorted with disgust and strove to turn their backs to the blinding snow.

Potapoff continued his answer as if nothing had happened.

"We call him the Black Czar, because we believe the Black One has misled his mind, as he did that of the Czar Paul."†

The captain looked at the sergeant through the snow-flakes with a strange expression.

"You talk like a bold man, sergeant."

"I am a free Don Cossack," was the simple reply.

Some sort of sudden irritability seemed to seize Captain Blank, for he struck spurs into his horse and rode into the teeth of the storm at full speed, followed by the hardy Cossacks.

*The Russian soldier's formula, "*Tsu hara tsu ya*."

†The Emperor Paul died in Napoleon's time, leaving four sons, Alexander, Constantine, Nicholas and Michael. Alexander I. succeeded him, beloved by all as the "White Czar." At Alexander's death the Grand Duke Constantine gave up the succession to Nicholas, whose harsh and cruel reign gained him the appellation of the "Black Czar." The present Emperor, Alexander II., son of Nicholas, inherits the amiable disposition and beloved title of his uncle. He also is known as the "White Czar." The Emperor Paul was generally thought to be a madman, and was assassinated.

On through gathering snow-drifts he dashed, without any seeming object, facing the cutting storm as if he rejoiced in it, till the distant howling of a pack of wolves on the steppe came past his ears, borne on the wings of the north wind.

Then he beckoned Potapoff alongside once more.

"What are those wolves howling about?" he asked, as he listened to the approaching cry. "Is there game on the steppe?"

Potapoff shook his head. They could hardly hear each other for the noise of the storm, as he shouted back:

"Not a head, your honor. It must be some travelers."

"Then come on, in God's name. He sent us here," cried Captain Blank, in answer.

And away went the Cossack patriot toward the distant wolves, led by mysterious Captain Blank.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE STORM.

PRESENTLY through the storm came flying a sledge, drawn by three horses at full speed, but without any noise of bells, while a black crowd of wolves galloped alongside, and tried to spring up at the horses and into the sledge, howling and snarling.

At the moment when this strange sight came across them, there was a red flash from the sledge, and the report of a gun; then a terrible snarling and growling followed, in the midst of which was heard the shrieks of a woman, as a black crowd of wolves leaped into the sledge.

A dark figure fell out behind on the snow, and Captain Blank fired into a heap of struggling wolves six shots from his revolver, while the Cossacks, with loud hurrahs, speared at the rest of the fierce brutes, as they galloped alongside the sledge, and fled into the steppe, out of sight.

Then, in a moment as it seemed, the young captain found himself left alone in the driving storm, the wolves all scattered in dismay, sledge and Cossacks alike lost to view and rushing toward the fort before the merciless gale, while in front of him lay two dead wolves, and a woman, who might or might not be dead as the case should turn out.

The young captain was in the act of swinging himself off his horse to find out, when the woman rose up on her knees in the snow, and turned her face toward him.

And Captain Blank stared at it in wonderment, for it was as the face of the queen of all beauty, and that beauty brunette.

Eyes of wonderful size and depth were fixed on his, eyes whose magnetic power might have lured angels down from heaven. The fur hood which had concealed her in the sledge had fallen back in the struggle with the wolves, and allowed a mass of black curls to escape over her shoulders; while a dark face, with the perfect outline of Italian beauty, keen, aquiline and rich in color, completed the spell which enthralled him.

This lovely creature, kneeling there alone in the snow, clasped her hands piteously and addressed him in imploring tones:

"For the love of our Lord Christ and all the saints, good my lord, ride back whence you came, and leave me here."

The officer for a moment was astounded.

"Leave you here, madam, in the midst of a terrible snow-storm! As an officer and a gentleman I could not do such a thing."

"As an officer and a gentleman, if you wish to earn the undying gratitude of a broken-hearted woman, do not detain me," she cried, passionately. "Oh, you do not know what hangs upon my journey, sir, or you would not stop me. I can not, I will not go with you to that fort, alive."

The young officer looked gravely at her. Wildly as the storm swept past them, there was something in this frail, beautiful girl that seemed to defy all its rage, and to be totally devoid of fear, even after her late escape from instant death by such a hair's breadth.

"Gracious lady," said Captain Blank, "if I leave you here in the snow, you will infallibly be buried alive and frozen to death. Do you know that?"

Then, for the first time, she started up, and looked around as if bewildered, murmuring:

"The sledge—where is Demetri?"

"The sledge has been carried away by your frightened horses," said the officer, kindly; "and ere this, my Cossacks have found and stopped it. Your only chance of reaching it is to go with me."

"And what then?" asked the lady, eagerly; "may I pursue my way? Will you not stop me?"

"I fear it will be my duty to take you to the fort," said the captain, in a grave tone, "unless you have a regular passport."

"I have none," said the lady, frankly, but in a despairing tone; "but oh, sir, something in your face tells me that I can hope for reason and pity from you. On my journey hang life, liberty, and happiness, for one who—"

"Enough," interrupted the officer, gently raising his hand as if to deprecate further speech;

"I seek not to know your secrets. As an officer of the czar, it is my duty to take you to Fort Peroffsky; as a knight of the cross, I must help a woman. Tell me only this, do you love Russia? Are you true to the czar?"

"God knoweth that I am," she said, clasping her hands. "Oh, sir, if you knew all—"

"I would know nothing but this," he said, gravely; "you are a lady and in distress. I dare not leave you to perish. Give me your hand."

He extended his own as he spoke. With singular activity the lady placed one foot on his in the stirrup, and sprung up to the horse's croup.

"We have lost time enough," said Captain Blank. "Now we must ride to save our lives."

Away went the fiery Ukraine stallion down the wind at a rapid pace, and the storm seemed to abate as he sailed before it. Captain and lady held their peace as they plunged along through the rapidly-deepening snow, which already was up to the fetlocks of the steed.

They galloped on in silence, mile after mile, their only guide the wind, which blew directly toward Fort Peroffsky.

After a long ride, the horse began to neigh loudly, and the call was answered some distance ahead.

"My Cossacks and the sledge," was the only commentary of Captain Blank.

He felt the figure of his companion tremble all over as he spoke, and the clasp of her arms loosened round his waist, but she said nothing.

Presently a gray, plunging ghost of a horseman powdered with snow loomed up ahead, and grim Sergeant Potapoff came riding up, saluting as if nothing had happened.

"Where is the sledge?" asked the captain, as Potapoff wheeled and rode alongside in silence. Through the howling storm the Cossack shouted back:

"Halted, a verst ahead, gracious captain. We could not kill off the wolves and stop it before."

"Call off your party, and we will go back to camp," said the captain. "The sledge will proceed alone."

He felt a close pressure of the lady's arms as he spoke, and Potapoff galloped away into the mist of snow-flakes, while the mysterious captain slackened his pace, and rode at a canter.

"Gracious lady," he said, to his fair partner, "I am taking a risk for your sake no other man in Russia would take. You are about to cross the frontier, and I know what you are, a political prisoner. Nay, fear not, I will not betray you, for your face tells me you do not lie! To you I say, do not make me repent this."

The tones of his voice were grave and solemn, and he turned and looked in his companion's face. The dark eyes met his own blue ones with perfect frankness, and they were full of tears, as she answered:

"My lord, you shall not repent it, and Russia shall not."

"I hope not," he said, gravely; "and now tell me frankly, are you not afraid to face this storm alone? Remember that our post is the only human habitation for many hundred miles."

"My lord," said the lady, proudly, "you say you know me. If you do, you know that a Russian noble never feared to be alone with God."

As she spoke, they discerned the dim outline of the sledge through the driving snow, and there on the box sat the man she had called Demetri, waiting, while the party of Cossacks were drawn up at some distance off. The captain pulled up the sledge, and the lady jumped off and buried herself among the furs, without a word. Then she turned to the strange officer without speaking, and kissed her hand. He raised his cap in a courteous salute, Demetri cracked his whip, and away went the sledge to the south, lost in the storm in a moment.

Captain Blank rode slowly toward the fort, as if in deep thought. Ere long he beckoned to Potapoff, and asked:

"Sergeant, what lies in the way yonder sledge is going?"

"The open steppe, your honor. They will be lost to a certainty unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless they come across the Middle Horde of the Tartars, and then God help them, for the heathen will sell them for slaves to the Khan of Khive."

CHAPTER III.

THE MINISTER OF POLICE.

In a large chamber in the Winter Palace at St. Petersburg stood a handsome officer of courtly presence, dressed in the dark-green uniform of a major-general, his breast covered with crosses, while under his arm was a large portfolio.

The handsome dark face of this officer, with a closely-trimmed black mustache, had yet a stealthy and cunning look about it that was not altogether agreeable. He stood with his head bent, smiling obsequiously before a very tall, heavily-built man, in the uniform of an officer of cuirassiers, who sat by a table on which reposed his helmet and sword, an expression of pride and irritation on his haughty features.

"Your majesty commanded me to watch at all times, and I have done so," said the obsequious general. "My spies are in every regiment and garrison from Lapland to Peroffsky, and—"

"Enough, enough, general," said the czar, harshly. "Your trumpet is a loud one, but you blow it too often. Can you tell me at this minute what they are saying about the declaration of war in Moscow?"

The general smiled, blandly, and opened his portfolio, from which he produced a paper, saying:

"Your majesty has only to command to be obeyed. Here is the report of Inspector Karkoff, about the language used in the tea-gardens, by shopkeepers, serfs, and all the rest. The prevailing sentiment was loyalty to the czar, and death to the Turk."

The czar took the paper, and glanced over it carelessly.

"Of course," he said, sullenly; "that's the old story. I see the bright side of the picture only. General Gorloff, where is the dark side? What do the Old Believers say?"

The czar had a cold, cruel eye, and he fixed it sternly on the Minister of Police. Gorloff bowed and smiled deprecatingly, as he said:

"I did not wish to anger your majesty with the sayings of that scum. Here is the report of Inspector Boris. He pretends to be an Old Believer, and has access to all their secrets save one. That, your majesty, I will frankly own has baffled our best men."

"And what is that?" asked the czar, coldly, as he took the paper handed by the minister.

"It is the secret of the order of Knights called Brothers of the Starry Cross," said Gorloff, in a low tone. "One of my men became a member, but three days after he was found dead, with a cross-cut over his cleft heart. He never reported."

The czar made no answer, but perused the paper he held, in silence. As he read, a dark frown gathered on his brow, and when he had finished, he turned to Gorloff.

"General," he said, with a face outwardly calm, but his eyes glaring fearfully, "I am glad I saw this report. These Old Believers have been a thorn in my side all these years, but I'll root them out if it costs me my crown. So they presume to criticise my measures, and call the Holy Orthodox Church schismatic, do they? Let them look to themselves. Prince Gallitzin is their chief. Watch him closely. If one word escapes him, even if it be in the sanctity of his chamber, let me know at once, if that word be treasonable."

Gorloff rubbed his hands and smiled.

"The Princess Gallitzin is in my pay, sire."

Nicholas smiled back an answer.

"Gorloff, you are a treasure. I hate that man. Has he spoken?"

"Nothing but this, your majesty. Prince Dolgoroucki told him one day that he had fallen under your majesty's displeasure, and might be degraded. Gallitzin, before a large company, said, 'Tell the czar he cannot degrade me, for my ancestors were grand dukes in Russia, when the Romanoffs were counts of Holstein Gottorp.' And the company laughed, for they were all old Boyars."

The emperor's face turned purple as he listened, and he hoarsely whispered:

"He shall go to the mines for that, by the soul of Peter."

Gorloff smiled again, his usual bland, insinuating smile, as he said, in a low tone:

"It might not be politic at present, sire. Prince Gallitzin is the head of the young Russian party, to which three-fourths of the high officials belong. This war with the English is by no means popular with the army, and if the prince were once in Siberia, he might do more mischief than even here."

The czar started, and looked at the minister earnestly. There was a hidden meaning in the other's words he had not fully fathomed, but he felt vaguely apprehensive.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "Speak without fear."

Gorloff straightened up, and looked his master straight in the face.

"Simply this, your majesty. There are five prisoners in Siberia, now, for every soldier, and all they need is a leader. This morning I received intelligence that a female crossed the border by Fort Peroffsky into the Independent Steppe, and that that female was—"

He leaned over and whispered a name into the emperor's ear, and that name produced a remarkable effect on the czar. The autocrat of all the Russias turned pale and trembled.

"Well, well, how did she get out? What was Grodjinsky doing to let her go?" he asked in a low voice.

"The general was in the fort, sire; a terrible storm was raging; a Cossack patrol was out and came in, driven by the storm. One of the men babbled in his drink that their new captain had let a prisoner escape across the border; and, at the same time, I received notice that one Anna Bronk had disappeared from Tobolsk. Putting things together, I found that Anna Bronk and the escaped prisoner were the same. Your majesty knows who is Anna Bronk."

The czar listened in silence with great attention. Then he said:

"And the officer who let her escape. Is he alive? Who is he?"

"Captain Blank, your majesty."

"Captain Blank," said the czar, slowly, "that is no name. Who is Captain Blank?"

General Gorloff smiled again and opened his portfolio.

"Here, your majesty," he said, "is a list, as near as my men can find out, of avowed Brothers of the Starry Cross. Captain Blank is set down as a Grand Commander."

The emperor rose to his feet and faced General Gorloff, with a lurid light in his eye, that bold men were wont to quail under.

"I asked you, Gorloff, who is this captain who dares let prisoners cross my borders unchecked. You answer by telling me what he is—an enemy of mine. Do you mean to say that my minister of police does not know?"

Gorloff turned pale under his master's anger, and stammered:

"Gracious sire, General Grodjinsky himself does not know. This captain brought an order in your majesty's own handwriting, directing all officers on the frontier to obey him as if he were your own self. The order was couched in the same words as that given by your majesty to his imperial highness, the Czarevitch."

"To my son!" echoed the emperor, astounded.

"It was a duplicate, your majesty; how obtained, no one knows. The Grand Duke Alexander arrived at the fort three days after Captain Blank left, and Grodjinsky and he had a fine laugh about the impostor. It seems that Grodjinsky took him for the grand duke himself."

The czar had been listening impatiently. Now he interrupted.

"You are my minister of police. A prisoner has escaped, whose mission means death to Russia. A traitor allowed her to escape. I want that traitor found. I give you one year to bring to me the woman, one month for the man. If you fail, look to your head. I have spoken."

General Gorloff saw his master was in grim earnest.

"Your majesty," he said quietly, "there is one man in your dominions who can solve this mystery to-day."

"Who is that?" asked the czar, scornfully.

At that moment a knock at the door was followed by the voice of the orderly announcing, as if answering the question:

"His imperial highness, the Czarevitch."

CHAPTER IV.

PRINCE GALLITZIN.

IN Russia there are two great parties in politics, two in religion. Old Russia and Young Russia hate each other in politics; the Orthodox Church and the Old Believers anathematize each other in religion. Now Young Russia is Free Russia, tolerant in religion, headed by the czar. Twenty years ago Old Russia was in power, persecuting Old Believers, and Nicholas was the head of the Orthodox Church.

Within the empire, superior in numbers, but deprived of power, stood the Young Russian party, and its recognized chief was Prince Alexis Gallitzin.

Prince Gallitzin, a tall, stately gentleman, with gray hair, and drooping gray mustache, dressed in the universal military uniform, stood in his drawing-room, looking absently from the window at the streams of sleds flying down the great ice-mountain erected on the frozen Neva, near his palace.

Several ladies and gentlemen were in the room, chatting on the usual nothings of fashionable society; and at last one of them mentioned the subject of the war, just declared by the allies against Russia.

The Princess Gallitzin, a tall, queenly-looking lady, with dark hair and black eyes of unusual splendor, immediately said:

"There can be no doubt that his imperial majesty will sweep the insolent Franks and Moslems alike into the sea. We are all as one in the belief that Russia must conquer."

Prince Gallitzin turned from the window with his hand behind his back, and observed:

"It is always unwise, Sergia, to boast of a battle before it is fought. We shall meet no unworthy adversaries in these French. Remember, I was a boy at Borodino."

Several other gentlemen ventured to express a timid doubt as to whether it would be easy to beat the allies, when the princess interrupted in a sneering tone.

"What, are you all against Russia? 'Tis lucky Gorloff is not here."

Then Prince Gallitzin, in a peculiar voice, said:

"Who knows that he is not here now, by his spy, Sergia? For my part I would not give myself the trouble to turn aside to step on vermin like Gorloff and his crew of so-called nobles, creatures of one man."

*Czarevitch or Cæsarevitch. The heir apparent of the Czar or Cæsar. Vitch is the Russian for the "Son of," as Czar is a corruption of Cæsar. Nicholas was thus Nicholas Alexandrovitch, Alexander is now Alexander Nikolaevitch, etc.

Princess Sergia smiled placidly.

"You forget that that man is the czar."

"I forget nothing," said Gallitzin, carelessly; "not even whom I have raised to rank ere this. Good-morning, madam. Come, Dolgoroucki, the sledge waits."

And the two old princes, heads of the noblest houses in Russia, left the saloon together, and descended the broad marble stairs. The princess turned ghastly pale at some hidden meaning in her husband's words, and bit her lip till the blood came, while her eyes flashed a momentary glance after his receding form that few men would have liked to encounter.

But the next instant she was all smiles and pleasantry, as she conversed with Colonel Count Ruloff, one of the old noblesse of Russia, who alone frequented the Gallitzin palace.

The cause of her secret rage and the prince's sneer was well known to all there, although none noticed it ostensibly. Prince Gallitzin, twenty years before, had married the beautiful Sergia Newsky, the star prima donna of the Imperial Opera House, for her beauty and her voice. He had found, too late, that he had married a devil in passion, and their life had been embittered by constant quarrels ever since. The princess was—a Gipsy. In that word lay the explanation of all. The wild Gipsy blood was not tamed in her, and the Princess Gallitzin was true to her old tribe, in deceit, vindictiveness and boundless extravagance.

When her husband refused at last to sanction the perpetual demands on his purse, which might have crippled the czar himself, then it was that Sergia listened to the persuasive voice of Gorloff, and became—a police spy on her own husband.

And Gallitzin knew it, and disdained to notice it, save by a sarcasm such as now sent the tigress-blood to Sergia's heart.

"Let it go, Boris," he said to his brother prince, as the latter made some remark to him about caution when they were driving away.

"I know that every word I say goes to Gorloff, and thence to Romanoff. But what care I? Let them send me to Siberia, if they dare. The Gallitzin led Russian armies against Jenghis Khan, six hundred years ago, when the Romanoffs were German counts. If they drive me to the wall, they'll find no Polish Jew about me. I will light such a flame—"

"Hush!" said Dolgoroucki, cautiously; "you forget you are in the streets, with spies on the box, perhaps. After all, neither you nor I would do harm to Russia, and she has chosen the Romanoffs for her czars."

"Understand me," said the old prince, haughtily; "I recognize Nicholas Romanoff as my czar, and so long as he respects the old houses that made his, so long I obey him. But I speak my mind where I will, and let him or Gorloff stop me if they dare. Nay, Boris, don't look so grave. There are no spies among my serfs. I'll trust them all as I would—"

And here he suddenly broke off abruptly.

They were passing the winter palace, and two magnificent equipages stood before the grand entrance, which both nobles instantly recognized. One was the gorgeous sleigh of the minister of police, and the other bore on the side panels the imperial arms.

"The Grand Duke Alexander has come back," was the remark of the politic Dolgoroucki.

"The best of the breed is home at last. Now we shall be safe from that low-bred hound Gorloff, and his spies," said fiery Gallitzin, as he passed close to the minister's sledge, and looked full in the face of an aide-de-camp who was awaiting his chief on the back seat. He spoke loudly to be heard.

The young officer flushed deeply, and tugged nervously at his yellow mustache, but he did not dare say anything, and the sleigh of the two most powerful nobles in Russia went jingling down the street. Then cautious Dolgoroucki observed:

"What ails you, Alexis, that you must ever be making enemies? You insulted that man and his chief without need or reason."

"Quite the reverse, my friend," said Gallitzin, calmly. "That man who sat there so quietly is Gorloff's head spy in the palace, and will tell his master just what I say. It will make Gorloff furious, for as you know, he hates to be reminded of his low origin. Well, an angry man is no match for a cool one, and I am cool. I'll beat that Gorloff before many years are out, and you shall see his name among the men condemned to the knout. He and I have an old score to settle, and I'll pay it up with interest."

"An old account to settle? How so?" asked Prince Boris.

Gallitzin laughed bitterly.

"You don't know, Boris. How should you, innocent old fellow? You spend the autumn hunting bears on your estates, and the summer at the roulette tables of Baden. You never hear of those who disappear, and are returned for dead by the police. Let it pass. I am sorry we saw that dog's sleigh. Let us go to the country again, Boris, before the snow melts and the roads disappear. I am sick of this place since Nadia left us."

Something in the theme seemed to sadden the old prince, for he turned aside his head, and dashed his gloved hand across his eyes, as if the keen wind had made them water.

"Never mind, old friend," said Gallitzin, more cheerfully. "We hoped great things once from this marriage, but it was not to be. God and the czar would not permit it. How is Ivan?"

"He was in command of his regiment in the Caucasus, well and happy, when I heard from him last," said Dolgoroucki, quietly.

"Happy!" repeated Gallitzin, with an indescribable intonation; "and yet, God help us all, Nadia is not two years gone."

Dolgoroucki turned and looked at the other gravely, as he said:

"Gallitzin, my nephew, Ivan Cyprianoff, is not a man to forget so easily. He loves me, and does not wish to make me gloomy by telling of his own sorrows. But you will never see him wed mortal woman till Nadia rises from her grave to bid him to it. A Russian noble never breaks his word."

CHAPTER V.

THE SERF'S DEVOTION.

AWAY once more to the cradle of humanity, the heart of the east, the great steppes of Turkestan, now covered with the flowers of early spring, and sloping down by the precipices at the edge of Ust Urt to the tossing waves of the Caspian sea.

A great speckled bustard rose up from the grass, and ran forward with outspread wings, cackling out his joy to the returning sun. A covey of partridges and heavy ruffled Tartar grouse flapped over the green meadows with a loud whirr, calling to each other, and frightening the hare from her form, the antelope from her covert among the tall grass stems, as the glorious sun rose up out of the level steppe.

Yonder comes a Kirghis chief with a party of warriors, hawk on wrist, galloping over the greensward on their swift Turcoman steeds; and heigh! what a whirring of wings and shouting of horsemen as the swift goshawks are cast off and go dashing in among the birds! The great bustard sees his dreaded enemies coming, and rises in the air with beating pinions, towering perpendicularly aloft where the skimming goshawk cannot follow!

He thinks he is safe there for he has recognized his foes busy at the smaller low-flying game, and knows the goshawk cannot tower like himself.

But he reckons without his host, as the Tartar chief screams, excitedly, to his falconers:

"Ali, Hafiz, up with the *byrees* quickly! See yonder, a bustard of fifty pounds. Up, I say!"

And then comes a flapping and screaming as the falconers, in great haste, unhood and loosen two magnificent falcons, birds whose frowning black brows and pointed wings proclaim them to be the noble, high-flying peregrine falcons, dear to medieval romance, and still well known to the Tartar of the steppes.

Away go Jewel Eyes and Sultan, the chief's favorite falcons, rising in spiral circles higher and higher, and towering even above the powerful bustard, till Sultan pauses an instant above him, and then drops like a stone upon his enemy.

The bustard writhes over on his back in the air, presenting claw and beak in defense, a bird three times the size of the falcon; but Jewel Eyes has attained the summit of her flight, and comes dashing swiftly to her comrade's assistance. Down come the falcons on their quarry, with a clash of wings and grasping of talons; and then all three fall to the earth, entangled together, while the Tartars gallop up, shouting and swinging their lures, eager for the well-earned prey.

Just as the chief was leaping from his horse to secure his birds, a cry from one of his attendants caused him to look up.

"A boat, a boat from the Muscovite dogs! Look yonder!" yells Ali, the head falconer, pointing northward.

The chief looked. The perpendicular rocks that surround the dry plateau of Ust Urt jutted out into the sea not far off, and round the point came the sail of a large boat driving across the fresh east wind, over the sparkling waves.

"God is great and Mohammed is his prophet," said the chief, in his sententious Mussulman fashion. "The infidel dogs have the sea and the guns, the believers have the steppe here and Paradise hereafter. Let the dogs go. They have their great guns there, and yonder is a guard-boat."

At this moment a second falconer galloped in, crying:

"Mount and ride, great chief! See yonder, prey for us!"

The chief looked in the direction indicated, and saw two mounted figures galloping for dear life across the steppe toward the sea, between him and the precipice of Ust Urt.

In a moment he was in his saddle, and had caught up the broad ax that hung in front, the chief weapon of the Tartar.

"Infidel dogs escaping!" he shouted. "Cut

them off and take them alive. They are worth ten camels."

Away went twenty Kirghis warriors at head-long speed over the steppe, standing up in their short stirrups, and bending over their horses' necks, every man grasping his battle-ax nervously.

The people before them were evidently fugitives; for, as they came nearer, it could be seen that both wore the Russian dress, and one was a woman. Muscovites outside the lines meet scant mercy from the Moslem Kirghis.

The two fugitives were crossing the path of the Tartars, and rushing for the coast. It soon became plain that they would be intercepted. Their horses were poor and thin, as if from long travel, both were ridden barebacked, and the Tartars rode three feet to their two. Although they were half a mile off when first seen, it was not five minutes before both were within a hundred yards of the coast, just as the guard-boat luffed up and stood in toward the shore.

And then the male fugitive suddenly turned on the Tartars like a tiger, and drew a heavy saber as he turned. The woman was then several paces in advance, and the man shouted:

"Save yourself, dear lady. I can fight fifty of these. Ride into the sea. The boat will save you."

The lady hesitated a moment, and the Tartar chief, disdainful the man, spurred hard for the more valuable prize.

Then, with a startled scream of terror, away went the lady toward the coast; while Demetri the serf, for he it was, met the chief; and ran the point of his saber through the Tartar's body as he swept past, intent only on the woman.

The next moment poor Demetri was surrounded by uplifted axes, and fighting desperately, but with gigantic strength; while the lady was clear of her pursuers and down by the water's edge.

The Tartars were so intent on vengeance as to forget plunder for the time, and they pressed on the unhappy serf with ferocious yells. But Demetri fought with wonderful skill. Had he been better mounted he might even have escaped. As it was, his jaded beast, cut loose from the abandoned sledge at the end of the snow-line, was unable to answer the sudden call on its energies. Cut down by the blow of an ax, it fell to the earth, and there was the strong serf on the ground, dodging the ax-blows, stabbing horses, fighting like ten men, to engage the Tartars and save his beloved mistress, while the latter was already swimming her horse toward the approaching Russian guard-boat.

Then, all on a sudden, the report of a light piece of artillery was heard, and a white cloud shot from the bow of the boat, followed by the humming, whistling whirr of a shower of grape.

Down went several men and horses under that deadly fire, and the Tartars scattered and fled in dismay, leaving Demetri alone, staggering toward the shore, cut and hacked in a ghastly way, but still alive.

The Tartars left their chief and four warriors dead, while three more men hobbled off on foot, wounded; for Demetri's saber and that volley of grape had done fearful execution.

The serf, staggering to the shore, saw a small boat in the act of leaving the guard-boat, and just as it reached the figure of his mistress he sunk down on the beach, the blood dripping from his wounds on the white sand.

"Thank God! the gracious lady is safe," muttered Demetri; "and if I die for it, 'twill be only my duty."

And then the poor fellow swooned away from loss of blood, and knew no more. The bright sun shone, the breeze rustled the grass, the free steppe seemed to answer the laughing sea with the joy of existence, and there lay the dying serf, who had saved his lady's life at the expense of his own, alone on the Caspian shore.

But Demetri was not to die thus. Strong arms raised him, and stolid official faces were over him.

One said, in a dry, matter-of-course tone:

"Two prisoners, escaping from the mines. They won't try it again this year. Put him in the boat, Vassili. The doctor will attend to him. The captain says we've earned a reward for these two."

And when Demetri came to his senses, he found himself in a close, stuffy cabin, while his beloved mistress hung over him, weeping, and saying:

"Alas, Demetri, we have done all in vain. We are prisoners again."

CHAPTER VI.

CZAR AND CZAREVITCH.

At the moment when the servant announced the arrival of the Grand Duke Alexander, General Gorloff bowed deeply before the czar, and said in a low tone:

"His Imperial Highness can unravel the mystery, sire, I doubt not. Try him."

Then he retired softly behind the emperor's chair, and the next instant the czarevitch, tall and handsome, with his father's face and form, but with the singular kindness and gentleness

of his uncle expressed in his countenance, entered the room.

The Grand Duke Alexander, at thirty-five, was as much under his father's thumb as a boy of fourteen. His uniform of a colonel of Cossacks of the Guard, with the heron plume in the cap only allowed to be worn by the *hetman*, showed his position. It was nothing higher than that of a staff officer of the emperor, with plenty of work and little pleasure.

The Grand Duke entered, ungreeted by either czar or minister.

Since they last parted, Alexander had been on a trip of ten thousand miles, around the utmost confines of Siberia and back, to visit the posts of the Russian army as an inspecting officer for his father.

Now, as humbly as a private orderly, he doffed his fur cap, advanced before the emperor's chair, and said:

"Your majesty's orders have been obeyed, sire."

The czar looked at his son as coldly as if he had been a stone.

"Well, sir, so you have visited all the frontier. Have you any special report to make?"

"My report is here, sire, embodying all the posts." And the Grand Duke pulled a bundle of papers from his belt, which he handed to the emperor. Nicholas threw them on the table and gazed upon his son, in the stern, freezing manner of which he was so proud, and which generally struck awe into every one.

"You have performed your duty quickly, sir. I hope it has been done well. Who is Captain Blank?"

As the czar spoke the last words, he looked at the young heir to the empire keenly and scrutinizingly. Alexander met his gaze as calmly as if the question was a commonplace one. He did not express any surprise, he only said:

"I do not know, sire."

At this juncture Gorloff coughed—very delicately, it is true, but still in a manner expressive of disbelief. The Grand Duke raised his eyes to those of the minister with a certain look in them like his father's, and the general dropped his gaze modestly, while a faint smile played around his mustache.

The emperor turned his head quickly from one to the other, his eyes showing a great deal of the white, and then observed, in a deep, grating tone:

"Have you two gentlemen a secret between you that I cannot share? General Gorloff, you asked me to question the czarevitch about this Captain Blank, who lets prisoners escape. I have done so. He says he knows nothing of this fellow. What think you?"

"I do not venture to think," began Gorloff, in his most persuasive tones, "that his Imperial Highness knows who is Captain Blank, but I would respectfully submit that he may be able to tell something about the way in which the duplicate authority came into the hands of the anonymous scoundrel known as Captain Blank."

"Do you know *anything* of this captain, sir?" asked the czar, harshly. "If you do, tell us all at once."

"I know this, sire," said the prince, stiffly: "that several times, when I visited a post, this Captain Blank had visited it before, and by means of an order which he produced, had secured all the advantages which I hoped to have been alone in enjoying. Who and what he is no one knew, save that he bore a marvelous resemblance to myself. He was the cause of the escape of a prisoner named Anna Bronk, whom, with a serf named Demetri, he met near the border, and allowed to escape near Turkestan. General Grodjinsky told me this, but he could make no guess at the person. It is for the Minister of Police to do that, sire, is it not?"

Czar Nicholas smiled grimly.

"That is for myself to judge. As for you, I suppose you're longing to behold the faces of your family. Is it not so?"

"It certainly is, sire," said the Grand Duke, quietly.

He had been away from home for a year already, and had not dared to visit his family before reporting to his father and czar.

Then the emperor smiled his old pleasant smile, with his brows knit and his eyes very wide open.

"I think that you have done your work very well, sir; so well that I must employ you forthwith on fresh duty. You will be ready to start for the Crimea to-morrow night. Twelve hours is enough for a soldier to enjoy his home, and Russia is a camp among enemies. You have heard, I suppose, that the nephew of the Corsican upstart, whom my brother Alexander conquered, has declared war against us, with the help of the Infidels and the English."

"I have heard it, sire," said the Grand Duke, simply.

"Their forces are getting ready to descend on Sevastopol," said the czar. "To-morrow night you must be on the road. Visit the fortifications, consult with Colonel Todleben of the Engineers, and return hither in six weeks with a complete report. You fully understand?"

"I do, sire," said Alexander, somewhat stiffly.

"Then here are your orders. Now go home." And the czar handed him a folded parchment, turned his back on his son, and addressed Gorloff:

"General, remember we have not found out this Captain Blank. See to it that he does not play any more tricks on my son, on this trip. I hold you responsible for this good-natured imbecile."

The Minister of Police shot a peculiar glance at his master.

"I understand your majesty. This time I defy Captain Blank."

The czarevitch was still waiting, cap in hand. "What do you wait for, sir?" demanded the emperor, sharply.

"Has your majesty any further commands?" asked Alexander.

"None, dolt!" said his polite father, with a sneer.

"Then I wish your majesty a respectful adieu."

And the Grand Duke backed from the room and disappeared.

Nicholas turned to his minister with a laugh, for even he was sometimes jocular, after the manner of a playful tiger.

"Gorloff," he said, "with all your Slavonian craft, you are no match for us Germans.* That fellow has fooled you. He knows who Captain Blank is, and he won't tell. By St. Nicholas, sir, I feel proud of him, for all he is a soft-hearted fool, like the late czar. I know him better than you do. He'll dupe you and laugh at your spies, and Captain Blank will appear again. After all you are not fit for a Minister of Police, Gorloff. I shall have to send for Gallitzin. He fools you also."

And the czar rose and stalked to the window, with a great clatter of spur and saber. Gorloff, for the first time in the interview, flushed scarlet. The czar had pierced his professional vanity in the tenderest spot. He did hate and fear the two men named beyond every one in Russia.

The emperor stood at the window and beheld the Grand Duke enter his sleigh and drive away. Just as the horses started, the equipage of Prince Gallitzin came dashing back down the avenue and passed by. As the equipages met, Prince Gallitzin rose to his feet and saluted the czarevitch with a profound bow, a courtesy returned by the other with equal ceremony. Prince Dolgoroucki, on the other side of Gallitzin, merely touched his cap in military fashion. Then the czar laughed sneeringly, and as he did so Gallitzin looked up and saw him. The old prince stiffly replaced his cap, sat down with folded arms and was whirled away.

General Gorloff, trying to swallow his master's sarcasms, was growing calm, when the czar turned to him, with pale face and glittering eyes, saying, in a hissing whisper:

"Gorloff, I gave you a task. Here's one more. Watch that insolent dog Gallitzin for a traitor. He has publicly saluted the czarevitch, and refused to salute the czar. Find him guilty of treason, and the day you bring the proofs you shall be a prince. Now go. Watch them all, day and night."

The minister of the police left the palace, trembling with joy.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CIRCASSIANS.

THE western shore of the Caspian Sea towered abruptly to the skies from the edge of the water, and peak surmounted peak in the Caucasian range, up to the eternal snows of Mount Elboorz, a hundred miles away, and yet visible beside his brother Kasbek. In a little sheltered bay lay the Russian post of Baku, guarded by palisades and a strong garrison; and toward Baku the Russian guard-boat, which had captured the two fugitives on the frontier shore, was standing before a gentle evening breeze, the red glow of the setting sun falling on her white sails.

Baku was the only post for twenty miles, and the mountains between it and the next were still roamed freely by Schamyl's warriors.

On the evening when the guard-boat returned, sharp eyes were watching post and vessel alike, from the heights above the hamlet, and although the mountain was to all appearance still and quiet, several hundred men were concealed in the dark ravines, and horses were standing under the trees nibbling their forage, all saddled and equipped for war.

On the summit of a rock, gazing keenly down at the distant boat, stood a stern, handsome fellow of singular grace of figure, whose picturesque costume reminded one of a Crusader, had not the long, curiously ornamented gun he carried dispelled the illusion. He was a Circassian warrior, of that glorious type which has given the name Caucasian to a whole race; and he was a noble specimen of his mail-clad countrymen.

A second man, in sheep-skin cap and capote,

*The reigning family of Russia has made so many German marriages, since Peter's time, as to be at least nineteen-twentieths German.

lay on the ground beside him, peering over the edge of the precipice at a party of Cossacks riding through the pass below to Baku.

"*Staffir Allah!* (God is mighty) Hafiz," said the man on the ground to the standing one; "how I should like to try one shot at the Christian dogs yonder! I could take off their leader so easily. Shall I do it?"

The outpost frowned.

"Not for your life, fool. The prophet does not war on single men. Such a shot would warn them who is here, that they might keep double watch to-night. Let them pass. To-night they will be drunk, and keep slack ward. Yonder boat's coming back means something of joy to the infidel dogs. They are always drunk then."

"It's a hard thing to let them go without one shot," said the recumbent one, regretfully, as the party of Cossacks filed around a rock out of sight; "but I suppose we shall make amends to-night."

"Ay, ay," said Hafiz, earnestly; "to-night this blade shall drink deep of Muscovite blood, and the prophet Schamyl shall come to his own. See the boat, Ali; she is coasting along as if she were going to land some one outside the port. By the mercy of Allah, she is."

He placed his fingers to his lips and blew a short, shrill whistle. It was answered instantly from the rear, and a man came stealing out of the ravine to his side.

"Sergeant Pushkin, bring up the prisoners from below. The woman Bronk is to be sent to Tiflis to the governor. The man will have to be sent to the hospital till he gets well."

Captain Ivanhoff was a wooden Russian martinet, who did his duty without reference to captives' feelings. He had obeyed his orders to cruise up and down the east coast of the Caspian Sea, looking after escaped prisoners, and he had found two, whose names had been sent him from Fort Perofsky, as Anna Bronk and Demetri Soltikoff. The orders had been to send both, if able to travel, straight to Tiflis, without stopping at Baku. There was a posting-house with horses about half a mile below the turn, and thither the guard-boat steered, while the captain ordered up the prisoners.

Demetri, brought up on a stretcher, was obviously unfit to travel; indeed there was grave question of his living a week. The girl known as Anna Bronk was quiet, pale, but haughty and defiant. Captain Ivanhoff addressed her brutally.

"Now, woman, you will soon reap the punishment of your crimes. I am going to send you to Tiflis with Sergeant Pushkin, and on arrival there you will be knouted and sent back to Tobolsk. How do you like that prospect?"

Anna Bronk faced him with a strange light in her mysterious eyes.

"I will remember your words, Captain Ivanhoff, when I see you running the ranks, like a serf as you are. Lead on with your men, and do not dare to speak to a—"

"To a what?" asked Ivanhoff, sneeringly; "are you countess, or duchess, or princess, that an officer may not address you? Never mind. I have seen the knout tame as haughty spirits as yours."

As he spoke, he signed angrily to Pushkin to take her away, for the boat at that moment touched the little pier that marked the first station for political prisoners on the road to Tiflis.

A rude carriage, hung on long, springy poles, between wheels twelve feet apart, and known as a *tarantass*, was already in waiting, with four mounted Cossacks by the horses' heads.

The first sight of the distant guard-boat had brought it out.

The girl was not even allowed to take leave of Demetri, but hurried off by grim Sergeant Pushkin, who received from his chief the necessary papers. Then *crack* went the whip, and the three horses started at a gallop, the Cossacks riding stiffly alongside, with their rigid military seat, bumping like sacks.

They had not over two hundred yards to go before the road entered the dark defile of a mountain pass, and then they disappeared from view.

The girl thus forcibly conveyed away sat gloomily on a bundle of hay in the back part of the *tarantass* (there were no seats) and seemed to be buried in painful reflections.

After all the efforts and dangers of her escape she had been taken once more, and now was going back to a slavery that she well knew would be more arduous than ever. She seemed to be conscious of little, as the light faded out from the sky, and the pass became buried in deep darkness, compelling the Cossacks and their escort to bring their pace down to a walk. She sat still brooding.

Then, suddenly, as they were in the midst of a wood, there came a loud shout from the roadside, followed by the spitting red flashes of twenty muskets, and Sergeant Pushkin, with three Cossacks, fell dead or dying, while the *tarantass* horses snorted and reared in terror. The last Cossack wheeled round and fled to Baku, while the girl found herself seized and hustled out of the carriage by the fierce mountaineers of the Caucasus.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SACK OF BAKU.

THE commandant of the little village of Baku was sitting at supper with Captain Ivanhoff, of the guard-boat, and several other cronies; and all were pretty well "set up" with *vodka* or Russian brandy, when there was a tap at the door.

"Come in, in the name of the czar, whoever you be," said the commandant, with drunken solemnity; "but cut your report short, for we're engaged on important business."

Then the door opened, and an orderly appeared.

"Please, colonel, the officer of the day presents his duty, and has important intelligence to communicate."

"The officer of the day is always finding mare's nests," said the colonel, irritably. "Why doesn't he come to report himself?"

"Please, colonel, he is doubling the sentries." "Doubling the sentries! What for?" asked the commandant, lazily. "Ah, I know. This Strogonoff is a young fellow, fresh from the Academy at Moscow, and he scares easily. Send him to me, orderly."

The orderly disappeared, and the colonel remarked to Ivanhoff:

"You don't know what trouble I have with these young officers when they join. Every bush they see on the mountain seems to them to be a Circassian, waiting to devour them. Young Count Strogonoff has gone frightened at some peasant's story, and he thinks that Schamyl and all his warriors are coming down on us. Well, well, I shall not budge for them. Baku has stood one siege already, and is ready to stand another. Fill up your glass. His majesty's health."

The two officers were embracing each other with tipsy fervor, when a second tap, smart and loud, aroused them.

"Come in, Strogonoff," said the commandant; and into the room clattered a tall, slender young officer, whose haughty, high-bred air told the fact that his social rank was far above that of his vulgar commandant. He touched his cap slightly, and began:

"Colonel, the Circassians are round us, and will attack us inside of an hour. Will you authorize me to beat the alarm?"

"Poh! poh! my dear count," said the colonel, jestingly. "There's not a Circassian, except a few shepherds, for twenty miles. Did not the patrol come in at sunset, and report the mountain empty? You alarm yourself unnecessarily, count."

Count Strogonoff made an impatient motion.

"Colonel," he said, angrily, "you don't know what I do. Captain Ivanhoff sent a prisoner to Tiflis this evening under escort of four Cossacks. One of them has just come in, with a ball in his arm, to report the party killed, the prisoner taken, and himself chased up to the very gate by the enemy. Now, sir, will you take the responsibility of idleness after that?"

This sobered one of the party, Captain Ivanhoff, who jumped up and demanded:

"What, my prisoner gone! Gracious saints, colonel, we shall all be cashiered! She was an important capture. Why didn't you send a stronger party? Oh, why did I ever see this day?"

"Had you sent her in here you would have been safe," said Count Strogonoff, harshly. "Who but an idiot would have sent her off by night through these mountains with such a small escort? But we waste time, gentlemen. The prisoner is gone. Colonel, do you wish the garrison to be murdered in their beds, or shall I order the long roll?"

Count Strogonoff was a privileged character on account of his rank, or he would never have dared to address his commander in the tone he used. The colonel looked confused and scared as he said:

"Certainly, count, do as you think best. I hardly think—"

At the instant he was interrupted by an appalling shout and a sudden volley of musketry outside, followed by the cries and shots, telling of a sudden conflict, and the deep booming of the huge Circassian war-drums.

"Now you'll believe me," cried the young count, excitedly; and he rushed outside in desperate haste, leaving the commandant to stagger to the door.

Outside all was pitch dark, and the noise and confusion were fearful. The flashes of musketry within the fortifications revealed the fact that the enemy had effected an entrance; and soon came a rush of panic-stricken soldiers, fleeing from their quarters in wild disorder, and followed by swarms of little, active mountaineers, cutting and slashing with their razor-like blades, and shouting the savage war-cry of Mohammed and Schamyl.

The surprise was complete, the resistance feeble. Strogonoff himself rallied a few men with arms, and strove desperately to stem the current of disaster, but in a moment more the great gate of the post was thrown wide open, and a crowd of glittering horsemen rode in, bearing torches, and headed, on a black horse of singular beauty, by a chief, whose flowing

heard and green robes announced him to be the great prophet and leader, SCHAMYL.

Then, as the torches blazed up, Strogonoff saw that he was alone with his little group, and that the whole parade was swarming with enemies.

The dark-bearded prophet directed the assault; and down came a knot of horsemen on the Russian remnant, yelling like devils, firing pistols and brandishing sabers. The young officer fired his last pistol shot at the enemy, and the next moment was ridden down and trampled under foot, his men exterminated, and himself battered and bruised into insensibility by the rush of the horsemen.

"Forward, in the name of Allah!" cried the clear, sonorous voice of Schamyl. "Slay the common folk and take the chiefs!"

And well was that order obeyed by his daring followers, who swept all resistance away like cobwebs, and avenged in that hour many a cruelty inflicted by Russian hands.

In ten minutes more all was quiet, the last soldier slain, and the houses and barracks fired. A huddled crowd of helpless women and children, with a few men whose uniform told that they were officers, were gathered on the parade, surrounded by enemies, and awaiting the sentence of the Circassian leader.

The prophet rode forward, a short, square man, of great apparent strength, a green robe and turban shading his glittering mail, and called out:

"Let the chief of the Muscovite dogs be sent to my own stronghold, to be kept for exchange with our own people. Let the women and children be coupled together and sold for slaves. I have spoken. Return to your mountains, children of Allah."

He was about turning away, when the clatter of hoofs was heard, and a horseman rode in at full speed and threw his horse on its haunches before Schamyl.

"Great prophet," he said, "the outlying party on the Tiflis road has captured an infidel woman of surpassing beauty, and they report a heavy column of the enemy coming from Tiflis, with a general's flag."

"Send the prisoners away by the passes to the secret ravine," said Schamyl, eagerly. "We will try conclusions with this column in the woods. Hamet Bey, take charge of the prisoners. I myself will head the rest."

The girl known as Anna Bronk sat patiently in a corner of the tarantass, where her captors had left her; when they found what sort of a prisoner they had taken. The vehicle had been drawn off the road and ensconced in a thicket. It was pitch dark, and she was apparently unguarded. Not a sound struck the ear since her captors had left her there, and she had heard the vanishing echoes of horse-hoofs.

"Why should I not try it?" she suddenly said to herself, as she found herself undisturbed.

As the thought struck her, she sprang up and out of the carriage, and stole off through the woods. She knew not whither she was going, only she had a vague idea that she was leaving the coast, and approaching the Turkish frontier. Toward that she had been endeavoring to come ever since her escape, and toward that she felt she was going now. She had lost sight of the tarantass, and was beginning to flatter herself she was clear, when a hand was laid on her shoulder, and a stern voice demanded:

"Daughter of the Muscovite, whither would you go? Do you think that the warriors of Schamyl are blind and deaf? Your friends are coming on yonder road, and the prophet is ready to destroy them."

The girl exhibited no symptoms of surprise or alarm, as she answered, speaking his own language:

"Why call you me daughter of the Muscovite? I was their prisoner and you have rescued me. Where are the dogs coming?"

"Up the road from Tiflis," said the Circassian, unguardedly. "But how is it that you come to be a prisoner with them, beautiful damsel? I know you must be beautiful, from your voice."

"Never mind how I came there," said the girl, hurriedly; "but tell me, what will your people do with me, now they have got me?"

"You will be set apart for the prophet's harem," said the other, "as the loveliest maidens always are. Were you a true believer, he might even make you his wife. As for us poor warriors, we that have only a horse and arms must be content with a mountain-maid."

The girl pressed close to the warrior in the darkness.

"Suppose that you were to carry me off," she said, quietly; "how much could you sell me to the Turks for?"

The warrior started and ejaculated: "Staffir Allah, it is impossible—and yet—a hundred thousand piastres would be cheap for such as you."

She placed one arm in his caressingly. "The night is dark and the Circassian is brave," she said. "His horse would carry us out of Schamyl's reach in an hour, would it not?"

"It would," said the other, trembling with excitement. His soul was full of romance and

chivalry, like all his race, and he felt all on fire at the moment.

"Listen," said the girl, in a whisper: "you are poor, and you would be rich. You have nothing but horse and arms, and Schamyl is rich. Be brave, and you too may be rich. Mount your horse, and take me behind you, and ride to Tiflis."

"Impossible," said the other; "our scouts are watching the road now for the Muscovites, and if we passed the one, we should run into the other."

"Tell me your name," said the girl, suddenly.

"I am Hafiz, the son of Abdallah," said the warrior, proudly.

"I will remember that Hafiz, the son of Abdallah, is a coward," she said, turning away. "He dares not venture his neck for a maiden's love. Farewell, Hafiz."

She spoke with cutting scorn, and Hafiz cried out:

"Fairest maiden, I would risk perdition for thee. I will help thee away. Let the prophet go hang."

For answer the girl threw her arms round his neck, gratefully, in the true Circassian fashion.

"Thou art my own brave Hafiz," she whispered, softly, into his ear. "And now lead on!"

"Follow me, beautiful maiden," whispered Hafiz, and he stole off among the trees in cautious silence.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ESCAPE.

In a short time they emerged upon the dark, narrow road in which the tarantass had been seized, and the false vedette spoke, in a low tone:

"I am the only outpost on this part of the road, but the woods are full of men in ambush a little further on. They expect the enemy in half an hour, from the reports of the scouts. My horse is here."

And he went to a tree, and led out a splendidly-caparisoned horse, on whose housings the gold lace glittered, even in the faint starlight.

"Behold Alkader—the strong one—my princess," he said. "He will outpace any steed on the mountains, and gallop from dawn to dark; and with him will I bear away my princess, my white rose, to the sweet waters of Scutari."

"Which way shall we go then?" asked the girl, hesitatingly, "if we can not pass by this road."

"We will take the mountain paths to Kars and Erwan, that only I know," said Hafiz, "and ere morning we shall sleep in peace in my own cot on the mountain."

"Nay, nay," said the girl, hastily. "I said not so. You promised to take me to Kars, not to keep me in the mountains."

"Only mount Alkader, sweet princess, and all shall be well," said Hafiz, evasively. "Time flies."

"Tell me one thing," she said, "and I will: Would your people in ambush fire at a rider galloping from this way toward the enemy?"

"Perhaps not," said Hafiz. "They would take him for a scout sent by the prophet."

"Then help me to mount," said she, and stepped lightly on the warrior's hand, with the same remarkable agility that she had displayed before in accepting Captain Blank's offer.

Just as Hafiz was preparing to mount before her, the sound of a distant bugle startled both.

"What is that, Hafiz? Listen!" she said, earnestly.

"The Muscovite trumpet," said the warrior, coolly.

"Ay, but how far off are they? Place your ear to the ground and listen. So! Alkader!"

The spirited horse tossed his head at the sound of the bugle, and began to fidget. Just as Hafiz in obedience to his lady's wish, stooped down to the ground, the girl shifted her seat into the saddle itself, and took up the reins.

"The enemy are not a mile off," said Hafiz, listening. "We shall be able to escape during the fighting without being noticed."

"Perhaps," said the girl in a tone of scorn. "Meantime, farewell."

And before the astounded Hafiz could realize the trick she had played him, the quick-witted girl shook the rein, and was off at full speed down the narrow road toward the Russians, throwing back a taunting laugh as she went.

Hafiz had consented to fly with her, inspired by love and romance. His duty to the prophet neglected was as nothing with him to the *eclat* he would gain among the heroes of the Caucasus by carrying off a beautiful maiden to the mountains in the teeth of all danger.

The girl herself had enticed him to desert his post, and had fooled and deceived him. He was disgraced forever, unless he could repair the blunder. Mad with rage, he leveled his rifle and fired, and for all his answer heard the hoofs of Alkader speeding faster.

Meanwhile the fugitive girl herself galloped down the road past the silent woods in safety. The lurking enemies that were ensconced there did not stir, as the rapid tramp of the flying steed passed by them; and at last the girl emerged from the woods and saw before her an

open stretch of comparatively level road, on which a faint light shone from the sky.

A dark moving mass loomed up in the distance, emerging from a gap in the mountains; and the dull rumble of hoofs and wheels announced that the Russian column was coming unsuspiciously on. Then the fugitive, who seemed to be hunted of all men, by Russian and Circassian alike, never hesitated; but, urging Alkader with rein and voice, flew straight toward her enemies, the Russians.

In a moment more she was close to a group of horsemen in advance; and the loud command, "Halt!" was followed, ere she could obey it, by the reports of three carbines, the bullets whistling past her ears in dreadfully close proximity.

The fugitive pulled up her horse just in time to escape a pistol-shot, and a grim, bearded Cossack sergeant seized her rein, crying:

"Whither so fast, friend? Do you expect to pass Potapoff on duty? Eh, holy St. Nicholas! 'Tis a woman!"

"Where is your commandant?" panted the girl, eagerly. "I would see him at once. Schamyl is in yonder woods, lying in wait for your men; and he has taken Baku to-night."

"Say you so?" said old Potapoff, shrewdly, for it was that same redoubtable sergeant who had been ordered to the Caucasus. "Then we must send you back to the general. No, there is no need of it. Here comes a staff-officer."

And, in effect, at that moment up galloped an officer, who put the inquiry:

"What's the matter, sergeant? Who fired those shots?"

"I fired one, honored captain, and here is a woman who has escaped from the Circassians. She says that Schamyl is waiting for us in yonder woods, and has taken Baku."

The officer rode up to the girl and peered into her face in the darkness.

"Who are you?" he asked.

The girl started. She knew the voice of Captain Blank.

"I am she you saved at Peroffsky," she said, in a low voice. "I told you Russia should not repent it. Schamyl has taken Baku, and waits for you in yonder woods. You are warned. Now, in God's name, let me go."

The officer reached out his hand and pressed hers.

"I do not understand you," he said; "but I believe you are true to Russia. You shall depart in peace. Take this paper, and when you need to pass our lines, show it. Some will understand, some will not, but it will reach me, and I will save you. Now tell me, where are the enemy?"

She pointed to the dark woods.

"There, flanking the road."

"Enough," he said. "Now, farewell."

The girl galloped past the column halted in the road without further molestation, and as she turned into a side ravine, she heard the reports of artillery, which told that the Russians were shelling the woods from the open valley, under the guidance of that omnipresent and mysterious Captain Blank.

CHAPTER X.

MUSTAPHA BEY'S SLAVE.

MUSTAPHA BEY, governor of Kars, sat upon the square, cushioned divan of his chamber of justice, smoking the pipe of peace, and thanking God that his day's troubles were over. The worthy bey had been deciding innumerable petty disputes, about cows and goats, between contending peasants; he had been bothered with complaints of robberies on the part of his new Bashî Bozouks, raised to defend the province against the expected inroads of the Russians; and altogether he was tired out with the wrangling, and only anxious to be left alone. The bey was also much troubled in spirit about certain grave complaints that he heard had been sent about him to the sultan. He had allowed the troops too much license, and the consequences promised to be serious, unless he could contrive some way to appease the powers at Stamboul.

To him, gravely smoking and ruminating, suddenly entered his pipe-bearer, salaaming profoundly, who then stood before him in silence, with crossed arms.

The bey smoked on for some minutes without speaking. At last he raised his head and looked the pipe-bearer in the face.

"Well, Ali, what would you?"

"So please my lord," said Ali, bowing, "the Tartar slave-merchant, Yussuff, is without, and craves leave to see your highness."

"What wants the son of a burnt father?" asked the bey irritably. "Did I not tell him never to enter Kars again? He sold me a girl that he swore was as gentle as a lamb, and she turned out as wild as a child of Sheitan, and has kept my house in the torments of Jehamm ever since. Tell Yussuff to pack."

Ali stood his ground and urged hesitatingly:

"The merchant says that he has brought your highness a girl-slave fit to enter the harem of the sultan himself. He earnestly desires that you would see her, as he only wishes to take her to Stamboul, if your highness does not like her."

The old bey considered a moment.

"The dog has taste," he muttered. "That child of the evil one, Ayesha, was a beauty. Who knows? This may be a splendid present for the sultan, and I need not keep her myself."

He ruminated over his pipe in his slow, Oriental fashion, and finally spoke.

"Bismillah! In the name of Allah admit the dog."

Ali, whose palm had been previously greased by the slave-merchant, which partly accounted for his unusual boldness, stepped out, and presently returned with a dark, squat-looking Tartar, with a leering, sensual face. This man was magnificently dressed in the old Turkish fashion, and his green turban announced him to be a Hadji, one who had performed the pilgrimage to Mecca. He advanced to the foot of the divan, and prostrated himself with the utmost respect, kissing the ground three times, and saying:

"Oh, great my lord bey, like the sight of water in the desert is the sight of your highness, whose smile is like that of the angel of life! Poor Hadji Yussuff has brought for your highness a pearl without price, a jewel fit for the seraglio of the Padisha himself, and he has picked her up so cheap that he can afford to let your highness have her for a few thousand piasters, the mere price of a common black house-slave."

Mustapha Bey gravely motioned the other to stand before him, and smoked silently for some minutes before he said:

"Hadji Yussuff, may the grave of your mother be defiled, and may dogs howl over your father's bones! You cheated me in your last bargain; and by Allah, that Ayesha has brought more trouble into the house than a whole legion of devils! She has spit on my beard, and picked up knives to assault her mistress. She has the temper of Eblis himself! Whose dog are you to come into my presence after such a deed?"

Hadji Yussuff waved his hand deprecatingly, and protested:

"Good my lord, how can you suspect your slave of an intention to deceive you? The girl Ayesha was quiet enough with me, and never dared to show temper. If your highness should order her a dose of the stick daily, I warrant me she would soon be quiet. If your highness does not like her, I will even take her back."

The bey's eyes glittered, and he uttered a sigh of relief as he asked:

"Will you really? Ah, Yussuff, that is well said; and now for your new girl. Where is she, and how did you get her?"

"To please your highness, she is one of those Russians who was found among the mountains by a Circassian chief, having lost her way, and was brought down to the plains with a number of Circassian and Georgian girls, where I bought her."

"Is she beautiful?" asked the Bey.

Yussuff spread his hands in ecstasy. "A perfect Hour, my lord, with hair like a flowing river, and eyes like two dark pools of water. She is shaped like a gazelle, and can dance like a *ghawazee*" (professional dancer).

"What sort of a temper has she?" demanded the bey, cautiously. "I want no more Ayeshas, you know."

"Your highness shall see her before buying her," said Yussuff, with a wave of his hand, implying great things. "Have I your leave to introduce her?"

The governor nodded and turned to Ali, who had been standing by, waiting for orders.

"Bring the woman in, and clear the men out of the ante-room. Go."

Ali escorted Hadji Yussuff from the room, and the governor, on the divan, soliloquized:

"This may be a good thing if I can trade off Ayesha, and get this beauty to send to the sultan. True, the girl cost me a hundred thousand piasters*; but she will be cheap if he buys off this mob of complaining people at Stamboul, Allah Kerim!"

The old bey sat ruminating over his project till Ali re-entered the room, escorting Yussuff, the slave-merchant, and a veiled female figure, shrouded from head to foot in white drapery. In spite of the disfiguring disguise, there was a certain nameless air of grace and refinement about the figure that riveted attention and excited curiosity. A very diminutive foot, in a tiny red slipper, that peeped out from under the folds of the drapery, assisted to confirm the favorable impression made by the mysterious girl; and the old bey involuntarily took his pipe out of his mouth, and looked longingly at the figure. Then he turned angrily to Ali and growled:

"Pack, begone, son of a burnt father! Who wanted your black face and yellow eyes in the presence of Paradise? Go!"

Ali vanished, and the slave-merchant advanced with his silent charge to the foot of the divan.

"Now your highness shall see," he said, "whether I was not right when I promised you a perfect Hour, my lord."

As he spoke he whisked off the white veil,

* \$5,000.

and revealed to the enraptured gaze of Mustapha Bey the loveliest maiden he had ever seen.

"Allah akbar! God is great!" exclaimed the old Turk, licking his thick lips at the sight and leering affectionately at the new slave; "she is indeed a Hour!"

The girl so theatrically discovered was slender, graceful and rounded in shape, with long plaits of glistening black hair, and eyes like mountain lakes, deep, dark and clear. She was richly dressed in the Circassian fashion, and stood calmly before the bey, looking at him with a haughty grace such as a princess might have used to a slave. Mustapha Bey dropped his pipe, and exclaimed:

"Allah Kerim! she is fit for the sultan! Quick, Hadji, quick! name your terms, and you shall have Ayesha to boot. Wallah! she would seduce the prophet himself. What is her name?"

"Her name is Leila," said Hadji Yussuff. "Her price is, Ayesha, and a hundred thousand piasters."

"You shall have both," exclaimed Mustapha Bey. "Can you speak Turkish?"

The girl herself answered quietly:

"If my lord will send me to Stamboul, I can. If he keep me here, he will find me worse than Ayesha."

CHAPTER XI.

THE GOLDEN HORN.

THE sun was setting over the waters of the Golden Horn, and the city of Constantinople basked in its light like a city of fairyland. The long stretches of white wall that rose from the dark-blue waters were crowded with guns, and above them rose the seven hills of Stamboul, the slender minarets of the mosques shooting up like needles around the great gilded domes, set off by dark-green foliage below, while palace and kiosk, minaret and dome, alike combined in a picture of enthralling Eastern beauty.

The Golden Horn was crowded with shipping. English and French men-of-war lay at anchor, alongside of others from which floated the Crescent flag of the Porte. Men-of-war boats pulled here and there, among the graceful feluccas with their tall, triangular lateen sails; and light caïques,* like Indian canoes, shot to and fro among the other craft with marvelous swiftness.

On the soft evening breeze floated the cry of the muezzin from the minarets, calling the True Believers to prayer, with a long, sonorous chant, far sweeter than the clang of church bells.

The coffee-houses on the quay were crowded with English and French soldiers, on the way to their regiments, and the plodding Turks of Stamboul gazed with awe and astonishment on these barbarians, whose actions were so different to what they had been accustomed.

Here you might see a curious group outside of the principal coffee-house on the quay, consisting of four men, about as opposite in their demeanor as in their nationalities. There was a stolid, heavy English guardsman, a piper of the Black Watch,† a private of the Connaught Rangers, better known as the "Blackguard 88th," and finally a corporal of Zouaves with a black beard. All four of these gentlemen were in that state of drink in which national character comes out to the surface in the strongest light, and all four were consequently types of their races.

The guardsman was boozy and stolid, with an imperturbable gravity of demeanor that no joke could shake; the Scotchman was dry and sententious in his remarks, with a cunning twinkle in the corner of his gray eye; Paddy Carroll was quaint, witty and quarrelsome; and Corporal Pichot was singing the Marseillaise with patriotic fervor, alternating the verses with remarks on the ardor of a Frenchman's love for wine and women.

"Arrah, corpral, that's foine," exclaimed Mr. Carroll, admiringly, as Pichot concluded with:

"*Marchons, marchons, qu'un sang impur
Ab-br-r-r-r-reuve nos sillons.*"

The corporal of Zouaves burred his r's in the most ferocious manner, and foamed at the mouth with savage fervor, as he shouted the end of his song, and then enthusiastically embraced Piper McPherson, crying:

"My broder in arms, my br-rave Ecossais, how I love thee! Ah, but our nations have been *separe* so long, so long, and mon Dieu, to-gedder ve can vip all the world! To my arms, br-rave camarade!"

"Be jabers, thim Frinch is curious cr'atures,"

* Caique, a long, slender boat peculiar to Constantinople, with high bow and stern, and pulling one or more pair of sculls. Very swift.

† The 42d Highlanders of the British army, so named originally from their dark-colored plaids. This famous old regiment was first under fire at the battle of Fontenoy, 1745. Every regiment in the English service has its characteristic nickname, by which it is better known than its number. The 88th foot are recruited in Ireland and known as the Connaught Rangers.

said Paddy Carroll, reflectively, as he lighted his dureen with quick, short puffs. "Arrah, Higgs, darlin', did ye iver see a man hug another man like that afore? Begorra, the piper's a hairy ould cr'ature to be huggin' like a gal. Look at that now."

The grim piper shoved the enthusiastic Zouave away with some difficulty, and ejaculated:

"Hoot, mon, what the de'il ails ye? Can ye no' sut quiet and drink yer whusky like a sousy chiel as ye are, but ye maun be ravin' like a play-actor? Hoot awa'!"

"Arrah, corpral, corpral, look this way wunst, and, be jabers, ye'll never want to hug a hairy ould Scot again," suddenly exclaimed Paddy Carroll, pointing to the landing steps off the quay, close to where they were. The Zouave turned, with mercurial quickness of mood, to see what the other meant, and beheld a large four-oared caique, with the flag of the sultan's seraglio at the stern, debarking at the steps a group of Turkish women, under the guardianship of two black slaves in the sultan's uniform, with naked scimitars.

"Oh, ciel!" cried the corporal, as the closely muffled figures on the steps congregated together, looking much like bundles of clothes going to the wash; "who would think that such hideous disguises covered the beauties of Circassia? Mon Dieu, if one could only see their faces."

"And that's nae sic an easy thing," said Piper McPherson, slowly, rising as he spoke, and bringing his pipes to the front; "but gin ye like, Maister Peesho, I'll get ye a sicht o' them in a meenit."

"And how's that?" asked Carroll, innocently; "whin it's ag'in' the orders to disturb thim lazy divils o' Turks or their wimmin?"

"Patrick, laddie, there's mair ways o' killin' a dog than skinning him aleeve," said McPherson, dryly; "ye dinna ken, I suppose, wha Orpheus was?"

"Orfis! Orfis!" repeated Carroll. "Bedad, I know an officer named Captain O'Toole, but nothin' nearer."

"Aweel, then, I'll tell ye," said the piper, with a grunt; "Orpheus was a Hi'land gentleman that played the pipes before the king of Scotland, twenty thousand years before Columbus discovered Ireland, when the Black Watch was his majesty's body-guard."

Here he put the pipe into his mouth, and began to blow up the bag; and Carroll interjected:

"Howly Patrick! he must have been the piper that played before Moses, bedad."

Corporal Pichot had resumed his seat, and was gazing intently at the bevy of approaching women with all the impudent curiosity of a French Zouave. McPherson calmly continued his narration, while Tom Higgs, the British guardsman, sat ruminating, like an ox chewing the cud.

"Orpheus was a famous piper," said the Scot; "and they tell that he could gar the trees and stones to dance like human bodies. Aweel, laddie, there was never a McPherson yet that couldna mak' a mon dance gin he leeked, and I mind that these Turkey bodies are a'maist crazy when they hear a skirl o' the pibroch; sae, we'll see if we can na get them at it noo. Hoigh! laddies, spring till't."

As he spoke, he pressed the bag of the pibroch, already filled with wind, and the instrument uttered a fearful squeal, which instantly attracted the attention of every Turk within hearing. Like all barbarians, noise is the element that best pleases the Turks. Drums and cymbals are their favorites at home, and the skreigh of the bag-pipe came to most of them as an unimagined height of delight. The first loud bray brought a crowd, running—a marvel in lazy Stamboul—and, when the piper put on the buzzing drone, and started a maundering, discursive treble above it, all eyes were fixed on him, all ears open. Gray-headed old men and ragged little boys came running out of every alley to hear the Frankish music, and fat bundles of clothes called women, all muffled up, so as only to show the eyes, waddled out by dozens, blocking up the quay in front, and completely impeding the further progress of the party of women that had just landed from the caique, under the charge of the black slaves. Indeed, the latter had halted themselves, spellbound by the strange music, showing their white teeth from ear to ear with delight, and entirely forgetting their charges.

For over a minute McPherson continued to wobble up and down the gamut, without any particular tune, the shriller squeals of his instrument eliciting cries of delight, while the enthusiasm of his numerous audience was slowly rising.

Then at last he started the long, throbbing bass of the drone for several bars without variation, and gradually warmed into the irresistibly inspiring strains of the famous "Tullochgorum."

As the regular pulsating drone of the bass gradually quickened and became mingled with the rollicking treble, Paddy Carroll first caught the infection and leaped to his feet, where he stood, as stiff as a post, listening with painful

intentness to the progress of the air. Then, as it swelled up higher and louder, every note full of mirth, the Irishman uttered a tremendous howl, dashed his shako on the ground and leaped up in the air.

"Holy Moses, give me a shillela," he yelled, "till I show the devils how to foot it!"

And, failing a shillela, the wild Connaught man snatched the long chibouque from the nearest Turk, and, flourishing it in the air, dashed into a jig, unable to resist the music.

Corporal Pichot, who was still watching the strange women with sparkling eyes, fidgeted on his seat, attracted by the music, till he, too, could no longer resist.

"*Sacrrre tete de cochon!*" he yelled at last, springing on the table and kicking bottles and glasses in all directions. "*A moi, Carroll! Le cancan! Le cancan!*"

And in a moment he, too, was dancing "all over," kicking as high as his head, yelling at the top of his powerful lungs, and bouncing off the table among the crowd.

Tom Higgs, stolid and boozy as that giant in the bear-skin hat seemed, followed the example of the rest with a sudden explosion of tremendous laughter, as if he had just taken a joke, and dashed into the "Soldier's Hornpipe," opposite to a fat Turk, who was gazing in wonderment at the whole proceeding.

At first the Turks only laughed in vague hilarity, feeling that there was something indescribably joyful in the music; but not knowing how to express it, as a male Turk never dances from the cradle to the grave. But when they saw the infidels so irresistibly impelled to dance; and when crowds of other soldiers came swarming out, all of whom began to dance, as if by instinct; and when the stout piper kept playing louder and louder; finally they, too, caught the infection; and first the women, then the men, commenced together, each in their national grotesque fashion, while the black slaves in the sultan's uniform jumped and yelled in their crazy African way, slashing recklessly round with their razor-like scimitars in the sword-dance of the Arab.

Louder and louder played McPherson, thicker and thicker grew the crowd, wilder and wilder grew the demeanor of all. As the piper had predicted, the women had dropped their veils from their faces in the general license, and the jealous Turks were too full of spirits to notice it.

The only cool man in the assembly was McPherson, who stood blowing and playing, with a broad grin on his grim, bearded face. The only woman who seemed unmoved was one of the party that came with the sultan's harem caïque. She had dropped her veil, and stood, looking at the piper, a woman of wonderful brunette beauty, with eyes of peculiar splendor. She looked at him with a sad glance, contrasted with the merry faces of all present; and as if by an irresistible impulse, McPherson stopped.

The instant he did so, there was a dead silence, and people looked at each other with foolish faces. The women muffled themselves in their veils; the crowd dispersed; and the harem party swept by the piper through the throng.

A moment after, the piper felt a tug at his plaid, and beheld a little boy slave near him. The child slipped a note into his hand, and disappeared into the crowd.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PIPER OF THE BLACK WATCH.

SANDY MCPHERSON inspected the note which had just been put into his hand with great curiosity. The piper was a huge, brawny fellow, with frowsy hair, small, twinkling eyes, and high cheek-bones, buried in a grizzled, bushy beard—not at all the fellow to receive *billets-doux* you would say. And yet the letter that lay in his bony palm was so undoubtedly feminine in its aspect that Sandy chuckled to himself and muttered:

"Hech! if the auld wife could but see it, wadna there be a tizzlin' in ma wool! Pink paper, for a' the world like a duchess, and a' from a heathen Turkey woman! Odds! but she maun hae fallen in lo'e wi' me, as they ca' it."

Just at that moment the evening gun boomed its loud salute over land and sea; and, as if by magic, the groups of soldiers broke up and strolled on the way to their quarters.

The piper nodded a brief adieu to his comrades, and wended his way to the huge barrack, in which a detachment of his own regiment was quartered. As soon as he reached a comparatively secluded spot, he opened his letter.

It was short and prettily worded, written in English in a delicate hand. It ran thus:

"If you would save a Christian lady from dishonor, repair at midnight, with as many true-hearted comrades as you can collect to fill two caïques, to the water-stairs of the seraglio. I have been stolen and sold as a slave to the sultan, and shall try to make my escape to-night. I keep this letter for the first honest-looking soldier I meet, praying him for God's sake to aid the unhappy girl, torn from home and friends, who passes among the infidels by the name of

LEILA."

Sandy McPherson stood with the letter in his hand, scratching his head meditatively, for some minutes, chuckling.

"Eh, God save us!" he muttered; "here's a pretty kettle o' fish! What wad the auld wife say, gin she knowed a'?" Sandy, Sandy, my lad, the de'il's a-fushin' for yer virtue wi' a baited hook. A lassie sic as I ne'er saw before, sae bonny wi' her black een! Eh, Sandy, man, wull ye gang to the water-stairs to meet the lassie? And that wull I blithely, and I'll tak' auld Higgs wi' his musket, and Carroll and Mounseer Peesho, and we'll splut the skulls of ilka Turkeymon that daur meddle wi' us."

And the stout piper threw back his plaid, cocked his bonnet on one side, threw his pipes to his back, and brought the hilt of his claymore to the front, as he swaggered off, with the jaunty Highland swing of his race, toward the barracks of the Zouave detachment.

He met Corporal Pichot about to go in and beckoned to him.

The Frenchman returned, saying:

"Eh, mon brave Ecossais, what is the matter? It is almost roll-call."

"Hoot, mon, to the de'il wi' roll-ca'," said Sandy, gruffly. "Tell me, Peesho, wad ye no like to ha'e a look at thae beautifu' lassies we saw whiles ago? Wad ye resk bein' absent fra' tattoo for that?"

"*Quoi!* What!" cried the astounded Zouave. "Is dere really a chance, *camarade*? Absent from tattoo! Eh, mon dieu, it is but von day in the *salle de la police* (guard-house), and who knows what may happen? But, are you sure that we can see dem?"

"Coom awa', mon, and dinna be speerin' foolish questions," said the piper, impatiently. "I maun get twa mair braw laddies like yerself ere I can do ony thing; and Paddy Carroll wull be in quarters, whar we can no' get. I'll tell ye as we cam' along."

The Zouave thrust his arm within that of the piper, and the two hurried away to the quarters of the 88th, McPherson relating the substance of his letter as he went along. Presently, in turning a corner, they ran up against Paddy Carroll and Tom Higgs, the latter as solemn as a judge, while Paddy was lifting the "Cruiskeen Lawn" at the top of his voice, and flourishing the Turk's pipe-stick which he had forcibly taken in his enthusiasm.

It was in fact a big stick, and one commonly used by Turks for castigating purposes.

As soon as Paddy saw them, he yelled:

"Hurroo, boys! We'll all be absent from roll-call, and it's two days' guard we'll get for it, but, bedad, I'm goin' to make a night av it."

"Haud yer claverin', mon, and listen to me," said the piper, in a grave tone. "Wad ye baith like to tak' a trip to the Turkeymon's harem the night? Whusht! till I tell ye. I ha'e gotten sic a letter, mon! Ye mind the bonny lassie wi' the glowerin' black 'een that stood lukin' at us sae solemn-like. Aweel, laddies, she hae sent me a letter, tellin' how she's a Christian leddy, stolen by thae misbelievin' Turkeymen, an' how she'll be gangin' to escape the nicht by the water-stairs at the place they ca' the Serawlyo. And, oh, laddies, she says, winna we tak' twa caïques, and wait for her at midnight, and help carry her awa'? Higgs, mon, ye're a braw chiel to luk at, and 's strang as a bull. Paddy, ye're a de'il in a fight; and Mounseer Peesho's as souple as an eel. What say ye, laddies, wull ye cam' doon wi' me and try to get the sweet leddy awa', or wull I gang alane?"

"Sandy, ye divil, I'll go with ye as far as the next man, and, bedad, I can't say fairer," said Paddy Carroll, emphatically.

"I'll go," said the big guardsman, simply.

"And I will go, *parbleu*, and exterminate de Turc vat stand in de vay, for de lofe of de eyes of dat belle demoiselle," said the Zouave, with equal zeal.

"That's richt, laddies, that's brawly said," observed the piper. "Noo we four can cut the daylight oot of ony twenty Turkeymen, and a' we want is aims. I ha'e my claymore, and a bit pistol Capt'in McTavish gi'd me, that they ca' a revolver. Mounseer Peesho has his sword-bay'net, but Paddy and Higgs here they ha'e naething. What shall we do?"

"Bedad an' meself don't belave that same," said Paddy. "Sure and this ould pipe-stick makes an iligant shillela, so it does, and av we mate any o' thim Turks, begorra, we'll surround them and grab their swords, d'ye mind that now?"

"I'm game for that," put in the deep bass voice of the big Briton.

"Aweel, then, let's beganging," said the piper. "It's dark enuch noo, and we'll ha'e to hide fra' the patrol gin we want to get a boat. Wha's got any siller?"

"Silver is it?" said the Connaught Ranger, ruefully; "and it's meself don't know that same. Didn't I give me last pinny to that gr'asy ould Turk who gave us the stuff he called rakee for poteen, God forgive him, and may he niver hae to drink it. Sure and I'm cleaned out."

"Not a rap," said Tom Higgs, sententiously, as the piper turned, inquiringly, to him.

"Eh, God save us," said Sandy, discontentedly, "wha wid ha'e thocht that twa British sol-

diers wadna ha'e a hawbee at the gloamin' when the sairgeant gi'd them a week's pay this mornin'?" Mounseer Peesho, hoo is it wi' ye? Ha'e ye ony siller left?"

"*Helas! non,*" said Pichot, with a shrug. "*Que voulez vous, Monsieur MacPherson? Vat would you? A soldat Francais 'e is brave homme, bote 'e do not save de money. I have trois sous, t'ree vat you call 'a'pennie. Voila!*"

And he exhibited three coppers in his hand. Sandy scratched his head ruefully, and looked at his three comrades in silence for some time, as if different emotions were struggling in his mind.

"Save us and guide us," he muttered; "I'll ha'e to pay for the hail pairty! Oh, Sandy, but it's a sair trial for a savin' mon to plank doon his siller for thae feckless bodies. But the bonny leddy must e'en gang free, gin siller can do it. And I ha'e twal p'und, seventeen and saxpence in ma sporran.* Sae it must even be. The bonny leddy will dootless refund the siller when she comes to her ain, and the Laird wull gi'e me credit for't."

He seemed to have made up his mind to do a disagreeable job with as good a grace as possible; and, having overcome his Scotch thrift, proceeded to exercise the equally Scotch virtue of liberal hospitality, for he said, briskly:

"Aweel, gentlemen, a' soldiers are comrades, sae let's be gangin'. We'll ha'e to proceed to the quay, and find the lazy Turkeymen, to get twa caïques; and the quicker we gang about it the better."

The four comrades started for the quay in the gathering darkness.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HAREM.

OUTSIDE of Stamboul, and some distance up the Bosphorus, the seraglio buildings and gardens lay close to the water's edge, stretching over a large expanse of ground, and comprising many independent structures, outside of the harem proper. Baths, kiosks or summer-houses, a little mosque, guard-houses for the use of the black eunuchs on guard over the harem, beautiful gardens full of cypresses, all were surrounded by a low wall, which stretched along the shore, the musical ripple of the waves at its foot being the only sound audible in the clear starlight.

The seraglio buildings were all dark, and every human being within and without seemed to be asleep. The harem itself was a large building, gloomy in exterior, but built around an interior court on which all the resources of Saracenic architecture had been lavished to produce a picture, fairy-like and beautiful beyond expression in the daylight, and revealing glimpses of the same even in the dark.

The slender white marble shafts of a colonnade, surmounted by horse-shoe and pointed arches, inclosed a court, paved with tessellated blocks, in which flower-beds were inserted at intervals. A springing fountain tinkled in melodious monotone in the center, and the air was heavy with the odors of jasmine and tuberoses. Down overhead shone the silent stars, and at one side of the court a faint light shone from a low doorway.

Entering at this doorway, you would have to be cautious, to avoid stepping on a black slave, magnificently dressed, who lay sleeping across the entrance to a great marble-paved hall, in the midst of which burned a little lamp of antique form, whose light revealed numerous doors around the hall, and not a scrap of furniture save the pedestal on which the lamp itself stood.

Out of one of these doorways a comparatively bright light shone, and within it a dormitory could be seen, even from the hall. The apartment was large and lofty, the walls and ceiling painted in brilliant arabesques, and bordered with a high wainscot, while below a broad-cushioned divan ran round the room, on which reposed a bevy of lovely girls, blonde and brunette, equally beautiful, and dressed with that lavish splendor of ornament that marked them as the sultan's odalisques.

At the door of this room there lay a second slave beside his drawn scimitar, a withered, scarred old eunuch, with a face fretful and peevish even in sleep.

Just as the clock in the Frankish suburb of Pera tolled midnight, and the different men-of-war struck eight bells in the harbor, one of the reclining girls rose up from the cushions on which she had been lying, apparently asleep, and looked cautiously round her.

Like all the rest, she was fully dressed. Orientals lie down in their cloaks, different from our Western fashion. One glance at her great sorrowful dark eyes and perfectly oval face revealed Leila, the slave whom Mustapha Bey had bought of Hadji Yussuff and sent to his master to propitiate the Government. The girl was attired with greater richness than any one present. So beautiful a slave was well worth

* Sporran—the goat-skin purse hanging in front of a Highlander in full fig. It serves as a pocket in default of one in those articles which we deem so necessary, and which the Highlander dispenses with; i. e., breeches.

the extravagance of her master, and the next day was to see her presented formally to the sultan. The jewels on ears and neck, the magnificent girdles of gold, set with emeralds, that encircled her waist, were worth many thousands of dollars; and the tiny velvet slippers that incased her white and stockingless feet were sown with seed-pearls.

The girl Leila rose quietly from her place on the divan, and removed her slippers. Then she stole down barefooted to the marble pavement, and halted, breathlessly listening, while her eyes roved restlessly round the apartment.

Not a sound was audible but the soft breathing of her fellow-captives and the snoring of the guards at the doors.

Then the girl threw the long trailing train of her open outer robe over her arm, and stole toward the door as silent as a mouse.

When she arrived there, she looked earnestly at the sleeping eunuch, and noticed that his scimitar had escaped from his grasp. With a sudden, lightning-like clutch, strangely at variance with her slow and stealthy movements thus far, she darted upon it, and snatched it up without a clash.

Then a strange, joyful light shone in her eyes, and her lips moved as if in thanksgiving. She clutched the sword to her bosom and made a single, lofty, noiseless bound, alighting with all the grace of a trained dancer in the great outer hall.

Still there was nothing disturbing audible. The faint tinkle and splash of the fountain in the courtyard lulled the sleepers into deeper repose, and Leila crossed the great hall to the outer door. There lay the second guard, fast asleep, and by him lay his scimitar, but fastened to his wrist by a thong of leather.

The girl paused and examined him closely.

"I must disarm them both," she murmured. "If my gruff Scotch friend is without, and they wake up, there will be trouble. It is dangerous, but worth the risk."

Softly she knelt down, and with the edge of the scimitar she carried, which was sharp as any razor, divided the thong.

The sleeping guard stirred, and reached out his hand instinctively after his weapon. At the same instant the girl snatched it away, and sprung back a pace, her eyes blazing, a scimitar in either hand, while her lovely face became white and set with desperate resolve.

Had the slave awakened at that moment he would have been cut in half by the hunted, desperate creature before him, so wild with fear and resolve was she, so determined on escape at any cost.

But the eunuch stirred not, after his first turn. His hand opened and relaxed, and he lay over on his back, snoring louder than ever.

Then Leila's tense muscles and rigid frame gradually relaxed, and she crouched an instant, only to spring high over the guard at the next, and land in the court outside.

Then she stole away with fleet, noiseless steps across the court, past the leaping fountain, and presently stood beneath the low-arched corridor that led to the open air.

Here a new obstacle awaited her, in the shape of four more of the guards lying around the entrance; and more than that, a close gate, which seemed to be locked.

For a moment the girl halted and trembled, a strange, sinking feeling overcoming her heart. The next, she beheld the nodding plumes of Sandy, the Highland piper outside the gate.

CHAPTER XIV.

STEALING AN ODALISQUE.

OUT by the seraglio sea-wall the waves were patting the beach with gentle tappings, when the low dip and splash of oars became suddenly audible. Through the thick darkness which had gathered on the water, under a low-lying bank of mist, the long, curving prows of two caiques slowly pushed themselves, and brought up close to the water-stairs.

They were hailed by the shrill, querulous voice of the black eunuch on guard there, who called out something in Turkish which the occupants of the boat evidently did not understand, for the low growling of the bass voices of men in consultation was heard.

"What's the daft cr'ater claverin' aboot, the night?" grumbled the highland piper. "Gin I didna see him on the pawrapot, I'd say 'twas some auld wife gittin' hersel' fashed aboon naething. Mounseer Peesho, they say ye ken thae Aurabic tongues. Winna ye speer the cr'ater a question, what he's skreighing aboot?"

"Certainement, mon ami, bote 'e do not talk de Arabique," said Pichot, doubtfully; "bote onlee dat *mauvaise langue de la Turquie*."

"Maybe he'll unnerstan' ye, though," said the piper, shrewdly. "Thae cr'aters comes fra Egypt and siccan places, whaur they talks naethin' but Arabie."

The piper, as will be perceived in the course of his story, was by no means an uneducated man. On the contrary, like most of his countrymen, he had an immense passion for reading, and a large store of miscellaneous information. In this instance it proved correct, the eunuch on

guard being a Nubian slave, who understood the Zouave at once, and replied to him.

"He say dat ye are vere ve most not be," said the Zouave, "dat no man come on shore here bote de sultan. Vat s'all we do?"

"Beg the gentleman's pairdon cannily, and back oot," said the Scot, who had taken command of the party by tacit understanding. "I'm feared the lassie wull ha'e a hairder teem to gat oot than she thoct she wuld."

"Bote ve promees to *faire recousse* (rescue) de lady," objected the Zouave, in a chivalric spirit.

"Deed, mon, gin ye thunk we're ganging to rin oor heids abutt o' a stane wa', ye're dreefully mistaken," said Sandy, dryly. "There's a mony ways fra Cupar, ye ken, and ilka ane o' them leads back. Do as I tell ye, and dinna be clackin'. Ye'll ha'e the hail gawrison doon on ye, and do nae gude beseedes."

As he spoke, he backed water in his own boat, in the rear of which loomed the huge bear-skin hat of Tom Higgs, the guardsman; while Pichot obeyed his direction by apologizing to the guard for "having lost their way in the dark," and then followed his example.

The two caiques glided away into the fog, and were soon lost to the view of the mollified sentry, who was the only one in that part of the grounds. At a few hundred yards' distance the piper made a silent signal to his companions, and pulled in to the sea-wall, where they beached their boats undisturbed.

"Noo, lad," said McPherson, briskly, but in a low tone, "I'm ganging *dear-stalkin'*. Wait here till ye hear me whistle, and then pull to the water-stairs. Dinna ye speak a word, but jist troost to me. An auld Hieland man's the laddie to do't."

Not a word of objection came from the three comrades, all of them old soldiers, cool and confident, and heartily trusting to their comrade and leader, the stout piper. They remained in their places in silence while Sandy vaulted up on the low parapet and disappeared in the seraglio gardens.

The Highlander had left his pipes behind him in the boat, and his motions were perfectly free and unincumbered, in the light costume of his native heath. The dark green and black of his tartans harmonized perfectly with the somber green of the cypress and box in the garden, and his tread was as light and stealthy as that of the red Indian.

McPherson stole through the shrubbery toward the back of the sentry-box at the water-stairs, and soon came in sight of the black slave on guard.

The eunuch was sitting on the sea-wall looking out to sea; and as Sandy stole noiselessly toward him, he noticed that the sentry's head was nodding, as if he were falling asleep.

The piper drew from his belt the long, heavy silver-mounted pistol, which was his principal weapon, besides claymore and dirk; he grasped it by the barrel in the right hand, while he held up his claymore in the other, and stole up behind the unsuspecting guard.

With a single dexterous turn of the wrist he struck the other behind the ear with the butt of the pistol, and knocked him senseless. The guard dropped like a slaughtered ox, and Sandy pulled him back from the edge and uttered a low whistle. Before his comrades had arrived, the piper had bound and gagged the negro most effectually with his own sash, and deprived him of a saber, a yataghan (Turkish dagger), and two large and handsomely mounted pistols.

In a few minutes his three friends joined him, and Sandy proudly distributed the weapons he had so adroitly secured, when he said:

"Now, laddies, the coast's clear so fair. We maun explore the viceenity, and find the bonny leddy, for I fear me it's mair difficult for her to gat oot than for us to gang in. Tom Higgs, wull ye stay here, and watch the blackgaird I ha'e killit? Gin he comes to leefe and tries to skreigh, sit on him. Ye comprehend?"

"I'm game for it," said the big guardsman, and took his station beside the senseless negro with a grin, holding the keen scimitar just taken from the latter, while Pichot and Paddy Carroll divided the pistols, and the Irishman kept the yataghan.

Then, headed by the piper, the trio stole off through the grounds, keeping on the soft grass, and stealing about among the trees, so as to screen themselves as much as possible.

Before they had gone far, the great square mass of the harem, gloomy as a prison in external appearance, with but a few windows of small size in view, loomed up before them. Sandy led the way, and paused behind a laurel thicket.

"Whusht! The bonny leddy's intil there, lads. Ye canna stip sae saft as I can. Therefore bide ye here while I gang to yon bit gatie and spy in. Be ready, gin there's a foight, for we'll ha'e to spring tillt, to gat oot o' this wi' hail skins, gin there be."

The Highlander tightened his broad belt several holes, softly drew his claymore, and took the pistol in his other hand. It was, as he had intimated, a Colt's revolver, a present from his captain, and highly ornamented in the Highland fashion.

Thus prepared, Piper McPherson moved softly

toward the gate of the harem, stepping like a cat, but with the peculiar springy, elastic gait of the Highlander.

It was just as poor Leila paused in utter desperation and terror that Sandy appeared at the gate, and tried the lock. It was fastened, and for a moment the piper trembled for the girl. The next he passed his hand inside, felt around in the darkness, and discovered that the key was in the lock. He beckoned to Leila to advance, and the girl obeyed, stepping over the prostrate guards as light as thistle down.

"See, gin ye can turn the key fra the inseed," whispered Sandy. "Gin's no too roosty ye s'all gang free i' five meenits, my leddy."

"I cannot; my hands are full," she whispered. "I have taken the swords of two of the guards."

"Ha'e ye sae?" said the piper, in a delighted whisper. "My certie, but ye're a braw leddy, and ye've gotten us jist the airms we want. Hand them to me through the gate, my leddy, and I'll ca' up my comrades."

She poked both scimitars between the bars of the gate, and the piper received them from her, then turned and motioned to his comrades, who he knew were watching him. In a moment more they came over the gravel walk in front of the gate, trying to be noiseless, but nevertheless making a considerable crunching, so loud that the four black slaves asleep by the gate began to stir in their sleep.

"Quick, quick, open the gate," whispered the Highlander. "Gin the dom'd tykes wouk oop, there'll be the de'il to pay, and nae putch bet."

He saw the white-robed girl within grasp the key with both hands and turn it, when instantly arose a fearful squeal from the rusty lock, in the midst of which there was a loud report, as a concealed cracker exploded, and all four of the guards leaped to their feet with a yell.

The Highlander threw off all caution from that moment.

"*Thoro mon diaoul!*" he growled, savagely, in his native Gaelic. "She canna be troosted to her ain pizness, but she puts her fut in it."

And he grasped the bars of the still-locked gate with his brawny hands and wrenched them open, breaking the rusty lock, just as the four eunuchs seized Leila.

"Tak' the swords and kill the callants!" he shouted, excitedly, as he flung the scimitars on the ground, to be snatched up by Pichot and Carroll.

Then he reared up his heavy claymore, and flew at the surprised and bewildered guards with the ferocity of a wildcat of his own Highland forests.

The eunuchs were surprised and dismayed at the sudden assault of the three foreigners, in whom they recognized, even in the darkness, the terrible barbarians, whom they dreaded almost as much as the Russians.

In a moment more Sandy had cloven one of them to the teeth, taken two clumsy blows on the edge of his claymore, and seized the slender form of Leila round the waist, while Carroll and the Zouave were driving the rest into the Harem Court, yelling like madmen.

"To the boats, to the boats!" shouted the deep voice of the piper. "Wad ye bring the hail army o' Turkey doon on us, mon? Coom along. I ha'e gotten the leddy."

And picking up Leila in his arms as if she had been a child, the brawny piper set off full speed to the water-stairs, followed at a little distance by the Zouave and Carroll, who had managed to demoralize the harem guards to that extent that they dared not follow them.

In a few moments they were at the stairs, and hurrying into the caiques, when they heard a great yelling near by, and perceived a quantity of guards running out of a building to the left of the harem, who opened a dropping fire upon them immediately.

"Pull, ye devils, pull!" cried Paddy. "Sure the Grand Turk's comin' to ate us up for st'alain' his wives."

All four bent to their oars with a will, and were pulling rapidly away from the shore, when the quick puff of a steam-engine sounded close by, and out of the mist rose the outlines of a man-of-war propeller, bearing the flag of the seraglio at her bow, and came running down on them, with loud commands in Turkish from her crew to stop.

As they continued to pull, the command was followed by a heavy volley of musketry.

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE MIST.

"CR-R-R-RACK! crack! crack!" went the muskets, and a shower of bullets whistled overhead and splashed into the water round them.

The four men continued to pull seaward through the mist as if nothing had happened. Only Paddy Carroll observed:

"And isn't it a pity to waste expinsive powther like that, boys? Sure the omadhams couldn't hit a barn av they was to try."

The caiques were very swift boats, but the steamer was still swifter; and in another minute was up to them.

"Doodle an' twist," cried the piper, as the

sharp bows of the propeller grazed the stern of his caique, and he suited the action to the word. Before the clumsy Turkish engineer could stop his engines, the two skiffs were heading for Pera in the wake of the guard-boat, and the latter had glided into the mist out of sight.

They could distinctly hear the puff of her engines subsiding, a loud clatter of voices through the night, then the renewed puff, puff, that told them their enemies had reversed the engine at last.

Still the two caiques were side by side, and completely buried in mist, when Sandy the piper spoke, in a low tone:

"Whusht, lads, dinna pull sae loud and strang. As far as runnin' awa's concerned, the steamer has the heels of us, but they canna' feend us i' the mirk, gin we're only carefu'. Let the Turkeymen gang speering aboon the hawbor a' they like, an' if they cam' too near us, jist lee still."

The advice was so obviously sound that it was instantly taken. Instead of continuing their violent efforts, the oars thundering in the rowlocks as before, they took a slow and measured stroke, listening and waiting on the motions of the propeller.

The puffing of the latter's engine was heard sweeping in circles through the fog, sometimes nearer, sometimes further off. Every time it approached the fugitives lay on their oars, and allowed their pursuers to pass by: every time it grew distant, they increased the distance by pulling away.

And all these movements took place in a time of profound darkness, in the midst of a dense fog, so that when they were pulling hardest, they knew not which way they were going.

At last came the welcome intelligence that the search was given up: coming in the shape of the fast lessening puffs of the harem guard-boat; and then it was that Sandy McPherson looked around him, and said:

"I wunner whaur are we, laddies? Does aeboddy ken?"

"And how should we?" asked Paddy, innocently. "Barrin' we're in the Bosporious, as they call it, divil a thing do I know. Sure and the tide 'll take us out to say, av we ain't carefu'."

"*Mon dieu, mes amis*," said Pichot, suddenly, "we are all adrift as you call it, and dere is no telling vere we stop. Dis *brouillard*, vat you call fog, is ver' t'ick, and there is no lights. Vy not ve let go de leetle bateaux, and vatch for de light of de sheeps?"

"Deed then, and it's the maist sensible thing we can du," said the piper; and a' this time, lads, we have na' said ilka word to the bonny leddy we ha' rescued, whilk is neither ceevil nor kind to the leddy, and whilk we beg her to pairdon us, as being anely intent upon getting ye safe oot of the enemy's clutches."

The girl Leila rose up from the stern of the piper's boat, where she had been crouched in perfect silence during the whole trip, and spoke in a low, clear voice.

"My preservers and friends, I thank you from the bottom of a grateful heart for your brave efforts in my behalf. We seem to be safe at last, at all events far away from the prison I fled. Tell me, what is yonder light, and you will be able to guide yourselves."

As she spoke, she pointed out into the mist ahead, and for the first time the other occupants of the boat perceived a dim green light shining through the fog.

"Eh, God guide us!" cried the piper; "the bonny leddy has the shairpest e'en of the pairty. Yon's a steamer light, my leddy, and we canna do better than to steer toward it."

"Do so, my brave friends," said the lady, "and only do me this favor: when you have ascertained in what direction the city lies, take me there, and conduct me to the American consulate. I have friends there that will take care of me. For yourselves, I request you, ere we go further, to accept of these rings as a testimony of my thankfulness to you. Do not hesitate to dispose of the jewels they contain, if you are in need, but I beg you to keep the rings themselves as a remembrance of me, and, if ever you should be taken prisoners by the Russians during the terrible war now about to open, you will find in them a passport to kind treatment, where you would least expect it."

As she spoke, she handed the piper four rings of various sizes, with the remark:

"Let the brave Scot keep the largest for himself, and distribute the rest as he judges best. Now forward."

The piper kissed the soft hand extended to him with deep respect, and placed the rings in his sporran.

"I'll do yer wull blithely, my leddy," he said. "Now, lads, spring till your oars."

Away went the two caiques through the mist, and rapidly neared the green light. They could see that it was hung over the side of a great, black mass, that resolved itself into a steamer lying at anchor. Close under the counter of the marine monster, a hoarse voice hailed them:

"Boat ahoy! where are you bound to at this time of night?"

"Deed and I'd be blithe gin I kened that same," responded Sandy, dryly. "We're jist

sodgers that's lost their way, ye ken, and we want you to tell us whaur the deil's Constantinople?"

"Off the larboard bow, ye land-lubbers," said the voice, in a gruff tone. "Them soldiers ain't got no more gumption than a flock of sheep, I'll swear."

"Thank ye kindly, mon," said Sandy, politely. "Ye're a braw laddie, and ye ha'e the manners o' a sailor, whilk is to say, no sae muckle o' those o' a gentleman. Gude-night."

They heard a grumbling volley of oaths as they pulled away from the ship; and, in about five minutes afterward, the lights of Stamboul gleamed through the fog ahead.

In a little while they had pulled in and landed; when the four comrades escorted their beautiful charge to the doors of the American consulate, and knocked loudly for admission.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LETTER.

COUNT IVAN CYPRIANOFF, brigade-general of Russian artillery, was riding slowly home toward Sebastopol from a tour of inspection of the neighboring redoubts, according to orders from the palace. He was accompanied by only a single orderly, a Don Cossack, none other than our old friend Potapoff.

The count was a young and handsome man, with aristocratic features and peculiarly soft manners. The expression of his clear-cut face was marked with general depression and sadness, an expression which never varied, save in addressing an inferior, when it was replaced by a smile of singular sweetness.

Count Ivan checked his horse on the summit of Balaklava hights, and looked down at the distant city of Sebastopol.

"Not for long, not for long," he murmured, "will the bells ring out peace and joy to thee, oh, thou city of the Tartar. Already I can hear the distant mutterings of the storm soon to break over thy head; and well may I tremble when I think of Russia and her danger, before the hordes of foes to attack her. Alas, I know what is coming better than those around—ah! what is it, Potapoff?" He interrupted himself as Potapoff coughed.

The sergeant saluted stiffly, and pointed seaward.

"A steamer, general, coming in."

The count gazed long and earnestly seaward, and beheld the long, black column of smoke on the horizon.

"It must be the Vladimir," he said, to himself. "She is the only cruiser out. Come, Potapoff, we must gallop if we expect to get the news in time."

He turned his horse and galloped at break-neck speed down the hill and across the deep ravine that separates Sebastopol from the mainland, followed by the Cossack.

It was a long ride, and not till the evening sun was sloping to the fortifications did the two horsemen enter the streets of Sebastopol. The young general of artillery was in command of the whole garrison at the time, awaiting the arrival of Prince Menschikoff and his army. As he rode through the gate, guards turned out, sentries saluted, and drums beat; but he only answered by raising his hat, and galloped on, pulling up at last at the Quay of St. Nicholas, just as the Vladimir came into full view among the masts of the shipping, and the swift war-steamer herself moved up to the quay with beating screw-blades.

On the quarter-deck stood a tall, dashing-looking officer, whose face and figure were unmistakably foreign. Not a feature of his countenance was eastern, but, on the contrary, western. The very manner of growth of his beard, thickest in front and thin at the cheeks, his hawk-like profile and piercing eyes, marked him, even in Russian naval uniform, for an American.

As the steamer stopped by the quay and threw out bow and stern lines, with a rapidity such as the slow Russians never could have accomplished unassisted, Count Cyprianoff raised his hat and called out, in English:

"All welcome, Captain Livingstone. Are there any news as yet?"

"Bushels of 'em, count. Got a letter for you. What d'ye think of that?" cried the dashing officer, in answer. "Will you wait till I come ashore, or are you good on the fly?"

As he spoke he held up a large, square letter, with a smile.

Count Cyprianoff held out both his hands, and the captain sent the white note flying to its destination. The young general caught it, and looked at the superscription, only to turn pale as death.

"Where got you this, Malcolm?" he asked, hoarsely.

The Russo-Yankee captain was so much absorbed in orders about his ropes that he neglected to reply; and the young general did not press the question. Instead, he thrust the letter into his bosom, and galloped away to his own quarters to read it in quiet, while Captain Malcolm Livingstone continued his task of securing the Vladimir to the quay.

When the vessel was fast, the captain beckoned to his second in command, and said to him: "I shall go on shore and report, now, baron. Keep the fires going and steam up, for we shall put to sea again in half an hour. Don't allow a man to leave, on any pretense."

Lieutenant Baron Pulsky saluted silently; and his captain left the boat and crossed the gang-plank to the shore; when he ordered it withdrawn, and once more reiterated his orders about non-communication with the shore.

Then he started up the broad street to the governor's palace, putting by all the numerous inquiries addressed to him by the lounging officers with the words:

"Secret orders, gentlemen. Not a word, till I have reported to the prince."

In a short time he stood before the palace of the governor, the rich and influential Prince Platoff, and, sending in his name, was admitted with alacrity.

He found the prince in his cabinet, in consultation with the young general of artillery, and a quiet, German-looking officer, who was introduced as Colonel Todleben, of the engineers.

The conversation was carried on in English, which all Russians of high rank speak with facility, they being, indeed, very remarkable linguists.

"Well, captain," said the prince, "and what news do you bring us? Have the enemy organized as yet?"

"The combined French and English fleets have sailed from Varna and Gallipoli, your highness," said Livingstone; "and in twenty-four hours more will be off our coasts. I went close in to them only last night, and counted fifty-seven sail of the line, besides a multitude of transports and frigates."

"What is their destination? can you tell us that?" said the prince.

"I can only conjecture it, your highness," said the captain. "They must be coming here."

"I can answer your highness the question," said the clear, soft voice of Cyprianoff, "if your highness will permit."

Prince and colonel both started, and fixed their eyes on the young general in surprise.

"You, count! why, how can you know?" asked Platoff.

"I am not at liberty to tell," said the young general, with visible embarrassment; "but I have received my intelligence from authentic sources. The enemy will land at or near Eupatoria."

"Impossible," said the colonel of engineers, with a smile. "I think your informant must be in error, general. Why, to land there would be to expose their rear to constant attacks, while we hold the Isthmus of Perekop. It would be good news, no doubt, to us, if they would be so kind as you say they are, but I can not believe our enemies to be any greater fools than myself. I should certainly attack Perekop, and so cut off Sebastopol from succor, were I the allies."

The count looked earnestly at Prince Platoff.

"Your highness," he said, "I assure you solemnly that my informant heard the matter discussed at a council of war between Lord Raglan and Marshal St. Arnaud. Eupatoria was settled on, as the landing point."

There was a deep silence. Even Malcolm Livingstone looked at his friend in doubt. At last Platoff said:

"Can you substantiate your statements, count? Where is your informant?"

"At the head-quarters of the allies," said the count quietly. "I can not say more at present, except this: if you find the information correct in thirty-six hours, I trust you will give me credit for truth when I bring you further news."

The prince rubbed his forehead thoughtfully.

"It is almost too good news to be true, count. They must be fools. Why, at this rate, their whole war will amount to no more than a mere siege of Sebastopol."

"That is the whole intention," said Cyprianoff, calmly.

"Is your informant one of the secret service?" asked the prince keenly. "Does Gorloff know him?"

"No, your highness," said the count, drawing himself up with sudden haughtiness. "None of Gorloff's minions is capable of doing one tithe of what my informant does every day, at the imminent risk of death. It is a friend of my own, for whose honor I would vouch, as for that of my father, mother, sister, or brother."

"You're lucky there, count," said Livingstone, with a droll look. "There are members of my family I wouldn't go bail for, to any extraordinary amount."

The prince shrugged his shoulders with a grimace. He too was troubled with black sheep in his family. But he only said:

"Are you sure your friend has full means of knowing? Is he a Russian?"

"I am not at liberty to answer," said the count, in a low tone. "My friend is true to Russia, and you will find the intelligence true. That your highness may be able to judge for yourself in the future, here is my friend's letter."

And he drew from his breast a small folded sheet of note-paper, and handed it to Platoff.

The prince read it slowly, aloud:

"In council of war, last night, I heard the full plan of campaign, which I send you. The enemy will land at Eupatoria, march overland to Sebastopol, and lay siege to it on the south side. They are about fifty-eight thousand strong, but have very few horses, and are deficient in transportation. You should attack them on the march, and harass them on all occasions. They have no head, and the two leaders are at constant variance. When I hear more, and can send it, I will let you know. At present, believe no one truer to Russia and you, than—

STARRY CROSS.

The party remained looking at each other for some minutes in silence, and then the prince observed, in a grave tone:

"Your friend belongs, I see, to a certain order, denounced by the emperor as traitors. I am not sure, Count Cyprianoff, but it is my duty to send this letter to the emperor, and place you under arrest for correspondence with the forbidden order. Perhaps, indeed, you belong to it." And he smiled furtively.

Cyprianoff stood up, and a significant glance passed between him, Livingstone, and Todleben; accompanied by a scarcely perceptible sign from one to the other. Then the count said:

"Prince Platoff, you know as well as I, who I am, and how many officers of your garrison are in the order. As an officer of the czar, you and I have certain duties. As *Brothers of the Starry Cross*, we have another, to stand by each other and save our country from all foes. Sir, I vouch for my friend as a *Grand Companion*. Is that enough?"

The prince said no more. He screwed up his wrinkled old face into a queer expression, and deliberately tore up the letter he held into small fragments, which he threw into the stove.

"As a Worthy Knight, do you venture to recommend my action on that letter?" he asked, at last, in a peculiarly earnest tone.

"I do," said Cyprianoff, with deep gravity.

"Then it shall be done, sir. Captain Livingstone, put to sea at once."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CAPTAIN OF THE VLADIMIR.

THE swift steamer Vladimir, of six guns, the crack vessel of the whole Russian navy in the Black sea, was out once more in the midnight: with deep clouds overhead through which the moonlight shone in occasional glimpses, and with a tossing sea beneath. The steamer was going at a low rate of speed, no lights exhibited from any part of her black hull, her naked spars entirely invisible in the thick darkness, whenever the moon went behind a cloud.

The Vladimir was one of those vessels, of a construction, since so common, twenty years ago almost unknown, which concentrated her offensive means in a few guns of great power. Many a time afterward she proved her ability to run away from the best vessels of England or France, and played a role of ubiquity and destruction only equaled since by the renowned Alabama.

Some three miles off, on the starboard bow, could be seen a long line of lights, dotting the sea for an immense extent, marking the line of the allied fleets, stretching toward Sebastopol, and the Vladimir was hovering round them in the darkness, watching their enemies.

Malcolm Livingstone, once of the U. S. service, now post-captain in the Russian navy, was seated in the mizzen-top, with a glass in his hand, scanning the hostile fleet intently. Beside him, in the top, was another officer, who was none other than General Count Cyprianoff, who had volunteered on this risky reconnaissance for reasons best known to himself.

"What will be the signal, Ivan?" asked Livingstone, after they had sat thus in silence for some time.

"A green rocket and three lights from the English admiral's vessel," said the count, in a low tone. "That will tell us whether to hover around any longer or return to Sebastopol."

"How so?"

"If one of the lights is red, we are to meet a boat with dispatches from my— Well, you know."

"Ay, ay, I know. But how are we to find the boat?"

"She will be a Stamboul felucca, carrying the Turkish flag, with a cross of stars on a little flag at the mast-head."

"By thunder! Why, that's the same craft that boarded me off Sinope, and gave me that letter, Ivan."

"I know it," said the count, calmly. "Did you notice the crew and captain, Malcolm?"

"Oh, common Turks—lazy and stupid. How the letter came to be trusted to them is more than I can imagine."

The count smiled.

"You're a good sailor, but a poor detective, Malcolm. Just such a messenger runs the least risk of detection."

"Ha! what's that?" said the captain, suddenly. The deep boom of a cannon echoed over the sea as he spoke, and the flash of the guns came from the center of the enemy's line.

A moment after up went three rockets to-

gether, of three different colors, from the supposed flagship; and five lights in a row were simultaneously displayed along her foreyard.

"What's that for?" muttered Livingstone. "I wish we had a copy of their signal code, Ivan. It's all Greek to us so far."

"That means 'head to the northward,'" said Ivan, quietly. "I received a copy of most of their signals in the letter you brought me. You little thought the value of the package you took when that Turk hailed you, Malcolm. Our own signal means 'follow the admiral's flagship.' They little think what it means to us though. See, yonder it goes."

As he spoke, down came the five lights on the distant ship, and they heard her blow her steam-whistle loudly, while the treble line of lights that suddenly swept into view announced her a three-decker with open ports, which had hauled her wind or put her helm to starboard; for they could distinctly see her moving in front of the rest of the fleet.

Then up went a green rocket, just as they expected, and the three lights followed it, the center one red.

Ivan uttered a low exclamation of joy.

"The boat is coming; perhaps I shall see her, Malcolm."

"Now, don't you go exciting yourself," said Malcolm, dryly. "We're a long way off from that boat yet. How are we going to find her, in the first place? We can't lie by till morning, or they'll chase us away."

"She must be somewhere astern of the transports, perhaps in their midst," said Cyprianoff, doubtfully; "but what to do I cannot say. Remember, I am no sailor."

The captain laughed.

"That's plain enough. Well, then, if she's among those transports, I'm going for her."

"Going for whom," asked Cyprianoff, surprised.

"Going for our friend in the felucca through those gentlemen yonder," said Livingstone, coolly. "It's no use beating round the bush any longer. It's a dark night, and the shortest way to find the transports astern, is to run down to the men-of-war-ahead. I'm going to try it, by thunder, sink or swim."

As he spoke he shut up the glass with an emphatic bang, and began to descend the rigging to the quarter-deck, followed by his friend, the general of artillery.

Arrived on deck, he called to his second in command, Baron Pulsky, saying:

"Call all hands to quarters without noise, baron. We are going to run the gantlet of the enemy's fleet."

The baron saluted, silently, and turned away to execute the order, while Livingstone addressed a midshipman.

"Tell the engineer officer to put on all steam, sir. We need a clean pair of heels to-night." Then to the helmsman: "Hard a-port. Run the ship down to the enemy's line at once."

In less than five minutes the guns were manned, the magazine open, and the Vladimir, with all hands at quarters, was running down on the allied fleet at sixteen knots an hour. Ten minutes more brought them under the guns of the whole fleet, and yet, so dark was the night, they were still unnoticed. Another minute would decide the question, and Livingstone called out:

"Silence fore and aft. I answer all hails. Wait for orders, and lie down at your guns."

Away went the swift steamer through the darkness, and in another moment was under the quarter of the gigantic three-decker, the Britannia, the flag-ship of the British admiral.

As they came nearer, there was a sudden bustle and noise on the flag-ship, and an officer sprang into the mizzen chains shouting:

"Ship ahoy! What ship's that? Avast there, or we'll fire into you! What ship's that, I say?"

"American sloop-of-war, Powhatan, bound for the Mediterranean," cried the clear tones of Livingstone. "My compliments to the admiral, and we're in a thundering hurry. Good-night!"

As he spoke the steamer rushed through the space in the line between flag-ship and follower at such a speed, and with such a close shave, that she carried away the bow-sprit of the next ship. Then she steamed into the disorderly crowd of transports astern, followed by a rattling volley of curses from the British officers, among which the epithets, "Yankee black-guard," "scoundrel," etc., etc., were the very mildest.

Livingstone shouted back through his trumpet:

"Good-by, gentlemen! Remember the Vladimir; and the next moment was hailed from close alongside.

"Vladimir ahoy! Take this from Starry Cross."

The captain looked over the side as the ship flew past a small felucca. On the deck stood a female figure wrapped in a cloak. The next minute a white package was thrown from the felucca, and fell on the steamer's deck.

And then came the thunder of cannon, as several ships opened fire on the reckless cruiser, flying away from them at sixteen knots an hour through the black night.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW DID THE NEWS COME?

THE czar of all the Russias was walking to and fro in his cabinet, with a deep scowl of anxiety and irritation on his brow, for he had received no news from the south since the allied fleet had departed from Vienna.

"Where are all my spies and couriers?" he muttered to himself. "What is the use of Gorloff, that he cannot tell me what is going on? I am surrounded with slaves, and not one of them serves me."

Stopping suddenly, he rung the hand-bell on the table with such force that he broke the clapper short off; and a soldier flung open the door, and stood there, saluting.

"Send for the minister of police at once," snapped the czar. "These lazy dogs are always out of the way when they're wanted. Why do you hesitate, fool? Do as I bid you."

And, with an access of that insane fury which he inherited from his father, Czar Paul, the irate monarch flung the remains of the bell at the soldier's head, striking the cuirassier helmet which he wore, and glancing off against a statuette in a niche, which was instantly shattered.

As if nothing had happened, the stolid cuirassier faced round and marched from the room, while the czar resumed his uneasy wild-beast walk, sullenly muttering to himself.

He had not long to wait. In less than five minutes the door was thrown open, and General Count Gorloff entered the room, a portfolio under his arm. The minister's face was pale with some hidden fear, but he wore his usual bland and insinuating smile, as he advanced and knelt to kiss the czar's hand.

Nicholas jerked it away impatiently, and demanded:

"Well, count, are there any news from Sebastopol? What are all your secret service men about? I suppose, before long, I shall have to wait for Menschikoff to send me a military dispatch. Why don't you answer, sir? Have you news or none?"

"I have news, sire," said Gorloff, in a low, quiet voice, which generally had the effect of soothing his master for the time.

"Out with them quick, then," said Nicholas, snappishly.

As he spoke, he sunk into a large arm-chair, and leaned back, his angry bloodshot eyes riveted on Gorloff's face.

"The fleet of the allies has left Varna and Gallipoli, sire, and it is supposed to be on its way to Perekop, so as to cut off the city of Sebastopol from all succor."

"I know that, fool. Anything more?" was the polished reply.

"Your majesty, I regret to announce that the enemy's fleet have bombarded and damaged the port of Odessa."

The czar frowned heavily.

"Fool, I know that too. The rumor came yesterday."

"Rumors, sire, are deceptive," said Gorloff, smiling blandly. "I have the only correct news that yet has reached St. Petersburg."

As the minister spoke, the thunder and clatter of a carriage, drawn up at the palace gate, announced the arrival of some person of distinction; and the czar motioned Gorloff to the window to see who it was.

As the minister of police looked out, a figure was vanishing under the arched doorway below, but Gorloff recognized the carriage in a moment.

"It is his Imperial Highness, Grand Duke Alexander, sire," he said, with a peculiar intonation of the voice, half-sneer, but veiled under a mask of courtesy.

The czar jumped up eagerly, for the first time in his life appearing anxious to see his son.

"He has news, I'll be bound, Gorloff," he exclaimed; "and by the shades of Peter and Catherine, you'd better look out for your reputation if he has."

Gorloff first flushed scarlet, and then turned white with rage. He had indeed been baffled in most of his attempts at collecting any intelligence of late, and could not explain the reason, except that some subtle influence was at work exposing his spies.

While he was considering what to do to turn the edge of the czar's sarcasm, the clatter of spurs and saber scabbards was heard in the broad corridor outside; and the door flew open, with the thundering announcement:

"His Imperial Highness, the czarevitch, and his Highness, Prince Gallitzin!"

The czar started as if he had been shot, at the last name, and, when the old prince entered the room with the young grand duke, he trembled slightly in spite of himself. The secret fact was that Nicholas, absolute bully as he appeared, was a coward at heart. He hated the prince as his deadliest foe, and here was that foe thrust upon him unawares, all in a moment. The boldness of the intrusion argued some justifying advantage, and for a moment Nicholas felt sick at heart.

But as for Gorloff, he was perfectly livid, for he knew both of the new-comers to be his enemies. His alarm was not lessened when the czarevitch, bowing before his father, said, with

a cool boldness, strikingly at variance with his usual subdued demeanor:

"I salute your majesty, and beg leave to report that I have but just returned from Sebastopol, where I left all things quiet. When I came away the English fleet had not left Varna. To-day I was overtaken by a courier belonging to Prince Gallitzin, who brought us such news, sire, that I beg that you will listen to it from the lips of the prince himself. It left the city of Sebastopol yesterday morning."

The czar sunk back in his seat in wonder and amazement.

"Yesterday morning! A thousand miles away! Impossible!"

"Your majesty will receive the regular intelligence in ten days more by the couriers of the prince," said Gallitzin, calmly, speaking for the first time. "It will then be easy to ascertain if my news is true or not. If it prove false, I offer my head against that of yonder blundering minister of police, who should have known what I know, and who has left it for a private nobleman to bring the only intelligence to your majesty, in the interest of Russia, that has yet been brought, straight from Sebastopol."

The czar looked at Gallitzin with a doubtful, wavering glance. Forced as he was by the thin mask of social and imperial courtesy to recognize the other, he was still more forced by the commanding, resolute will that looked out of the old aristocrat's eyes which cowed down even the gaze of a Romanoff.

"What is your news, prince?" he asked, huskily. "You are aware that you so seldom favor me with your presence at court, that I had no reason to expect you so suddenly. Do not consider me as wanting in courtesy if I request you to be brief. What news do you bring?"

"The allied army has landed at Eupatoria fifty-eight thousand strong; they have marched for Sebastopol; Prince Menschikoff met them by the Alma river, four days ago, with thirty thousand men, and was driven from his position at last. The enemy moved round Sebastopol to the south side, and have sat down before the city, into which the prince threw himself at once. I have a friend in the camp of the enemy who will serve your majesty to the death."

"A very pretty story, prince, but contradicted by my reports. At last advises the allied fleets were standing toward Perekop. Besides, how is it possible for your news to have traveled a thousand miles in two days? There are no railroads in Russia."

Prince Gallitzin made no more reply to the other than if he had been a distant dog barking. To the czar he bowed with stately gravity, saying:

"For the intrusion on your majesty I ask pardon. I should not have ventured on it had I not fortunately met his imperial highness, the czarévitch, who volunteered to introduce me. For the news your majesty is indebted to one greater than I, the great *Brotherhood of the Starry Cross*. If your majesty finds it true, he will know that that order is by no means the association of traitors which it has been represented, but, on the contrary, faithful and zealous servants of your majesty."

As he spoke, the prince knelt and kissed the hand of the czar, then turned and backed from the room. The czarévitch looked scornfully at the discomfited Gorloff, and said:

"Your majesty has heard the report. Have you any further orders for me?"

"None. Go home," said the czar, gruffly.

"I thank your majesty, and obey."

With that the heir apparent wheeled about and left the room, a covert smile on his face; while the czar brooded silently over his news, and Gorloff stood gnawing his lip in the corner.

Presently Nicholas looked up, and said to his minister, in a low, grinding voice:

"So Menschikoff has been beaten: and you have allowed that cursed Gallitzin to get the better of the czar about news? Now mark my words, Gorloff; find out how he gets the news, or you may find yourself traveling toward Siberia. Go. Leave me alone. Dolt, fool, you have failed."

With a savage frown he motioned Gorloff away, and the great minister of police slunk off, looking like a whipped cur.

CHAPTER XIX.

SEBASTOPOL.

THE city of Sebastopol, once so fair and stately, girded with the white walls of the fortresses, and resplendent with gilded domes and spires, was sadly changed in the month of October, 1854.

Bursting shells had done their full work on spire and dome, the trim white fortresses were almost entirely demolished, and the mouth of the harbor showed a ghastly-looking array of naked spars sticking out of the water, beneath which lay the pride of Russia's fleets, sunk to clog a channel they could not defend.

But, if the beauty was gone from Sebastopol, its strength was, on the other hand, doubled. Around the ruins of the trim white stone walls, that looked so strong and were so weak, had risen, as if by magic, in a few days, a succession of low banks of earth and deep trenches, in

which the black, deadly-looking guns of far more formidable batteries grinned defiance at the Allies.

On all sides Sebastopol was girdled with earth-works, hardly visible above the surface of the ground, but more dangerous by far than the casemates they had superseded.

And gathered afar off around these, in a succession of deep trenches and detached batteries, the allied hosts of England and France and Turkey, over sixty thousand strong, lay in their camps, watching the city, and fretting over the slow progress of the siege.

All the ardor and enthusiasm raised by the victory of the Alma had long ago evaporated, under the cautious and snail-like policy of the Allies. The same Russians who had retreated in rout from that battle, and who might have been overpowered in June by a vigorous attack on the half-manned fortifications, were now holding their own more stubbornly than ever, and were pressing their besiegers in turn. The divided Allies had found an united enemy, and the soul of the defense was the young colonel of engineers, the since famous Todleben.

The left of the English line connected with the right of the French in the trenches, and thus it happened that part of Sir Colin Campbell's brigade—the Highlanders—lay next to McMahon's equally renowned organization, the three regiments of Zouaves.

They were near each other in the trenches, but their camps were separated by one of the deep ravines so common about Sebastopol, where the ground is furrowed in precipitous trenches in all directions. This was known as the Woronzoff ravine.

When we come on the scene of operations, the 79th "Cameron Highlanders" had just relieved the "Black Watch" in the parallels, and the latter had been dismissed to their quarters, to seek rest.

"And whaur are ye ganging, Sandy?" asked a brother piper, as Mr. McPherson, leaving his pipes in his bell tent, started toward the edge of the ravine in the direction of the French camp. "Dinna ye ken that the Rooshians ha'e a clear sweep o' you wi' their heavy guns?"

"Hoot aye, I mind it, and I mind it no," said Sandy. "It's awa' to see a freend o' mine, among thae 'red-breaks,' ower yonner." And down the steep ravine plunged the athletic Highlander, without vouchsafing any more explanation, undeterred by the whirling hum of a round shot that plunged into the dirt below just as he started.

"Fire awa' and be dom'd," grumbled Sandy, who, like most old soldiers, had a great contempt for artillery. "Gin ye fire a' day, I've go saxty p'und ye wadna hit a cawmil, gin the beastie did na stand vara still."

And sure enough Sandy was right. Although the Russians had the range of the ravine, it was too far off for small arms, and the cannon balls that followed his appearance were all wide of the mark. The sturdy piper crossed the ravine in safety, and was greeted at the other side by his friend Pichot, who, in company with a number of his comrades, had been attracted to the edge of the ravine by the unusual firing to see what caused it.

"Aha, my brave Scot, it is thou?" he cried, assisting the other over the brow of the steep. "When they told me a Highlander was coming, I said 'It is my brave comrade, for certain.' And it is so."

"Yes, it's me, Mounseer Peesho," said Sandy, panting; "and gin ye h've a quiet place for a body to talk to ye, I'd like it weel."

Pichot looked in his companion's face a moment. The piper looked grave and stern, in place of his usual jolly manner.

"*Certainement, mon ami,*" said the Zouave, immediately. "We will come to my tent; 'tis not a barrack like yours, but I have only my comrade, Jean Biscard, and he is on guard. Follow me."

It must not be supposed that all this time the friends were under fire. As soon as they reached the crest of the ravine they had gone out of sight of the Russian artillery-men, who immediately ceased firing. In the Zouave camp their only annoyance was an occasional random shell, and those were seldom fired, in the ignorance prevailing as to the exact location of the camp.

Pichot led the way to his tiny shelter tent, which he occupied in common with a brother corporal, Biscard by name.

The entire structure was four feet high, five feet in width, and just long enough to cover two sleeping Zouaves from the rain. Monsieur Pichot had further improved his domicile by digging a large and commodious basement and sub-cellar, so that when you were fairly inside, a short man could stand upright in the center of the little tent, and contemplate at his leisure Pichot's crowning work of art, a small fire-place, with a chimney of *real bricks* in which a fagot was burning.

"You see, *mon ami,*" said the hospitable Zouave, pointing to the fire, "the French are a great nation. Those dull *rosbifs* of English—I say it with due respect to thee, my brave comrade—would never have gone two miles, as Biscard and I did, to steal those bricks and build a chimney. No, they will sit down in the mud

and grumble at their general for not building barracks, while we are warm and snug. What say you, my friend? It will be long ere we see the last of these shores. *Voici*, take this pipe, and solace thyself with a smoke. It is well that thou art come, for I captured a Russian last night. See him."

Pichot dived into a hole, which answered as a sub-cellar to the mansion, and produced therefrom a dead fowl, looking decidedly aged, and evidently of the male sex.

"*Tiens, mon Ecossais,*" he whispered, "if those thieves in the next tent knew of this, 'twould be gone before now. I heard him crow in the Russian trenches, last time when I was on guard; and as I answered him, the brave bird, thinking a rival was near, did fly over to our lines. Again he crowed, again I answered; and as he came near I captured him. *Helas, mon ami,* I fear he is tough; but what would you? It is war time. I have kept him for a week; and, my faith, we will stew him tender."

Even while he spoke the amiable Pichot was plucking his fowl with the expedition of a French cook. He cut up the unhappy "Russian," and immersed him in a large iron kettle, the spoil of some Russian cottage, doubtless, adding some herbs and pieces of bread, with true Gallic skill.

Then when the pot was bubbling slowly he turned to Sandy and said:

"Now, *mon ami*, dinner is in train. What have you to tell me?"

Sandy laid aside his empty pipe, and laid his hand on Pichot's arm, saying in a low tone:

"Peesho, ye mind the bonny ledy that gied us the rings?"

"*Helas, oui,*" said the Zouave, with a tragical sigh; "for my heart still retains the scar of the wound given by her eyes."

"Hoot tut, mon; I'm talkin' sense; dinna gang on wi' yer play-actor airs. Aweel, mon, let whisper in yer lug."

Pichot leaned over, and the Scot whispered in his ear.

"Mon, she's a *fausse quean*. She's a light o' love of yer fine General Pelisseer, and I'm thinkin' that—"

What more he might have said is uncertain, as at that moment a dull, dropping cannonade, that was growing so common as to be almost forgotten, swelled into a terrible roar; and, as if at the signal, the Zouave trumpeters and Highland pipers simultaneously blew the "assembly."

An alarm had occurred, and both friends rushed out of the tent.

CHAPTER XX.

DOLGOROUCKI'S BALL.

A GRAND ball was taking place that same evening in the spacious saloons of Prince Dolgoroucki on the Newsky Perspective. As usual in summer, St. Petersburg was choked with dust and heat in the daytime, while the nights were sharp and cold. The prince's ball was to include every notable in St. Petersburg, official or non-official, Old Russia and Young, believers of every stripe, for the prince was a cautious old trimmer, who, without the stern resolution of his friend Gallitzin, tried to make friends of all parties, while at heart an Old Believer.

It was about half-past eleven, and the rooms were already crowded with people. The floor was covered with waltzers to the music of one of those wonderful horn bands found only in Russia, in which every musician plays a single note at a time in the most rapid melodies. Uniforms covered with gold, and ladies' robes of all the hues of the rainbow, blended in gay pictures in all parts of the room, while the buzz of conversation was incessant.

Prince Gallitzin, stately and handsome as ever, smiling over his white mustache, stood among a group of ladies and noblemen, the center of a battery of questions on the news from the war. It had transpired in some way that he had news of a recent date, and he was implored by all the curious ones to tell it. But the prince, so open in the morning, was now as inscrutable as the sphinx. He parried all questions with wit, but gave no news to any. He was as cool as a cucumber, and perfectly aware that the spies of the minister of police were in the room, ready to report the slightest indiscretion on his part.

In another part of the room, lying back on a soft velvet couch, reposed the magnificent face and form of the Princess Gallitzin. She also had her circle of admirers, chiefly young officers, who adored her splendid beauty; but these all gave way in silence, when a quiet, smooth-spoken gentleman in black evening dress, approached the princess and requested "the pleasure of a waltz."

The quiet gentleman was the dreaded Minister of Police.

The princess bowed and smiled graciously, then took the arm of Gorloff and soon they were lost in the mazes of the waltz. As they went round and round, both excellent dancers, to all seeming wrapped in the enjoyment of the scene, no one would have supposed that a conversation, important to both, was in progress during the whole exercise.

And yet, had one been able to listen, he would have heard the following dialogue:

GORLOFF. How beautiful you are looking to-night! You seem as if you had heard some good news to-day. Your eyes sparkle. Have you anything to tell me, Sergia?

PRINCESS. I have. I can not speak loud here, but when we finish dancing, I will tell you something in the green-house. Meanwhile, I tell you this: Gallitzin has changed his mind. He talks of saving Russia and obeying the czar.

GORLOFF. I know. Have you heard the news from the war, which he came to tell the czar to-day?

PRINCESS. He has kept it secret from all but the silly fool, the czarevitch. I do not know, myself.

GORLOFF. Curse him!

PRINCESS. I echo that with all my heart.

GORLOFF. (*whispering*) Sergia, do you love me?

PRINCESS. You ought not to ask. You know what my reputation is worth, since you knew me. I have sacrificed much for you.

GORLOFF. The prince has some means of communication with the Crimea. *Find what they are.*

PRINCESS. You amaze me. Come, I am tired. We are near the green-house. Let us go in and hide, where we can talk.

GORLOFF. Agreed. I want your help worse than ever. The man we hate has humiliated me to-day, and the czar threatens me with Siberia, if I can not find how Gallitzin gets the news from Sebastopol.

He spoke in a low tone, and entered the conservatory, where he speedily found a quiet nook, to whisper undisturbed.

"Now tell me, what is the news?" said the princess, eagerly.

Gorloff whispered in her ear:

"Menschikoff is beaten, and yesterday the allies sat down before Sebastopol. I dare not deny it. It may be true, but, if so, *how did he get the news?* Where has he been for three days?"

"At home daily," said the princess, thoughtfully. "Stay: yesterday he rode out on the Moscow road, and I saw him return as if in haste, and shut himself up in his cabinet. This morning he rode out that way again, and only returned in a carriage with the czarevitch."

"Sergia," whispered the police minister, "I suspect something there. Gallitzin is high among these Brothers of the Starry Cross. Is not the czarevitch also one of them?"

"I think not," said Sergia, frankly; "you know he is such a stupid lout that they would not dare trust him, for fear his father might flog him into telling their secrets."

Gorloff laughed sarcastically, but pulled up short.

"I'm afraid you underrate him, Sergia. He's deeper than we think."

"At all events, he and the prince rarely meet," she said; "and so tell me all about your troubles."

The count detailed to her the stormy interview in the palace, that morning, and when he had told her all, the Gipsy princess became silent and thoughtful.

"Alexis," she said, presently, "I think that man must be a devil. He seems to despise us and our snares, and yet he sees every one. His news is true; and how he got it, no one can tell."

"You must find out, Sergia."

"But how?"

"Make friends with him, watch him day and night. Find where he goes; watch who comes to see him. If I do not find out, I am lost, unless the czar forgets his promise, which he does not often do."

"I know where he goes now," said the princess, calmly; "but the knowledge is of no use. He goes out on the Moscow road, to meet some one."

"Then find whom he meets, and tell me when he goes."

"He has ridden out every day, at eleven of the forenoon. To-morrow his horse is ordered for noon."

"My men shall shadow him," said the police minister, quietly. "He is a difficult fowl to snare, but, by heavens! I'll do it yet." Sweetest Sergia, your words are like balm to my heart. Only let me find out this secret channel of information, and I will tap it of its news, and turn it against its owner, and then we will do with him as we did with—"

"Hush!" said the princess, starting and turning deadly pale. "Not a word of *her*! She visits me every night when I am asleep, and, oh, Alexis, I shudder and tremble even in that sleep. Not a word of *her*, if you love me."

Gorloff looked at her with a peculiar grin.

"One would think she was dead, Sergia."

"Who knows," whispered the princess, staring round her, "where she may be if she is dead? It may be her spirit that brings news to Gallitzin."

Gorloff sneered.

"Bah! after all, you are only a woman. There are no spirits, Sergia. That is all a priest's lie. I will find out all about your wise lord to-morrow; and let him look to himself then. He shall follow *her*, and we shall be happy, Sergia."

Alone in the twilight of the green-house, the guilty pair exchanged glances of great meaning, and rose.

As they came back to the saloon, the first person they encountered was Prince Gallitzin himself, who scanned them from head to foot with cold contempt, and said, as he passed:

"The police spy who rides on the Moscow road to-morrow had better confess to the priest ere he goes."

And Sergia muttered:

"He has heard all. I told you he was a devil."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BOMBARDMENT.

WHEN Sandy and the Zouave reached the open air a terrible racket was going on. All the Russian batteries, from one end of the lines to the other, were thundering away in a general bombardment, and the allied gunners, not to be outdone, were answering vigorously.

A great white pall of smoke covered the trenches through which the humming *whi-r-r!* of round shot was heard, mingled with the *chul chul chul bon!!!* of the then novel rifle-shells, in our days so common.

Drums, bugles, fifes and bagpipes were all calling to arms along the trenches in quick, imperative tones, for such a sudden bombardment was regarded as the sure prelude to a sally of the besieged; and the besiegers were notoriously weak in numbers at that time.

"Good-by, Pesho," said the Scot, hastily. "I'll tell ye all, some ither time. We maun baith be ganging."

The Zouave wrung his comrade's hand, and hurriedly put on his belts to repair to the assembly, while Sandy, as hurriedly, ran to the edge of the ravine, and plunged headlong down the deep descent, unmindful of the hot fire prevailing.

"We're a' in God's hands, and I could na dodge them," muttered the brave piper, as he rushed down the side of the ravine. "The smoke's unco' theek, and I maun reesk it."

In a minute more he was in the bottom of the ravine, just as a ricocheting shot threw a shower of gravel over him, and knocked him flat with the wind of its passage.

It felt like a stunning blow, but Sandy had been knocked over in the same manner before, and he scrambled up in a hurry, picked up his cap and commenced the climb to his quarters in considerable hurry.

It was well he did so, for a second shot lighted on the very spot where he had fallen, and buried itself in the earth with a loud *blum* an instant later.

Up the steep ascent the brawny Scot toiled, escaping the fearful cannonade by one of those apparent miracles of which a soldier's life is so full; and, ten minutes after, was at the top of the further bank, and in sight of his own camp.

A single glance showed him that it was empty, save for a few officers' servants; and that the regiment was already on the color-line, behind the batteries, faintly discernible in the smoke, which was driving back over them.

"Eh, mon, but it's a sair disgrace to ye," grunted Sandy, as he ran to his tent for his pipes and claymore. "Fifteen year a piper of the Black Watch, and late at the gathering: Ye maun rin like a roebuck to mak' up for this, Sandy."

And run he did, with all his tough Highland sinews at full stretch; dashed into the great bell-tent, empty of all but his own accouterments; wrestled into them with desperate speed, and went off at the double-quick to join his brother pipers at the right of the regiment.

He found the Black Watch behind the batteries, standing in their ranks resting on their ordered arms, with the peculiar grim, iron silence characteristic of their famous corps. Not a head moved; the officers stood before their companies, leaning on their swords; the grim old colonel sat on his horse in front of the center; the whole regiment might have been thought a row of statues, but for the flutter of plaid and bonnet plume in the fitful breeze.

Sandy's arrival among the pipers was only greeted by a stern frown from the piper-major, who muttered, wrathfully:

"Twa days' pay for that, Piper McPherson. Did na ye hear the gathering, ye deaf loon; or were ye awa' efter some randy quean at the canteen, that ye're sae late?"

"I hoomly beg pairdon, meejor," said Sandy, submissively. "I was awa' wi' thae Frenchers, sir, and a twal-pund shot sot me on my hunkies wi' the whistle o' 't, crassing the glen. I hope ye'll excuse me, meejor."

"De'il an excuse," said the piper-major, sourly—like all the British non-commissioned officers, he was as important in his department as the colonel himself—"Ise wonnerin an auld sojer like ye, Sandy, s'uld gang efter thae heathen Frenchers; and gin ye talk ony mair, 'twill be three days' pay, ye graceless loon."

Sandy made no answer, but looked sulky; and silence was restored in the grim lines of the Black Watch, while the shot and shell kept screaming over their heads, and every now and then the sharp *spang* of a bursting bomb was

followed by the whistle and whirr of the ragged fragments hurtling round them and knocking the dirt all over them.

Presently an aid-de-camp came tearing along the line, as the fire grew hotter and hotter, and pulled up by the old colonel, and spoke, so as to be heard by every one:

"Sir George's compliments, Colonel MacGregor, and please to make the men lie down. The enemy give no further indications of a sally."

Then away galloped the young fellow to the next regiment, and ere he had gone twenty paces, came a terrible report, as a shell struck his horse, and exploded at the instant, tearing rider and steed into a ghastly mass of horrible fragments.

The old colonel turned to the Black Watch as calmly as if nothing had happened.

"Lie down in the ranks," he said; and the men obeyed in silence. But not an officer stirred. *It was not etiquette.*

The pipers maintained their post, also, with grave stolidity, and presently the colonel turned toward them, and silently beckoned with his finger.

"Bonnie Dundee, lads," said the piper-major, as he blew up his pibroch.

Then, high and piercing over the continual thunder of the tremendous cannonade, rose the shrill notes of the pipes, in the rollicking old Jacobite air that chronicles Highland deeds of nearly two centuries ago. The air was caught up by the 79th to the left, and a cheer ran along the line. It was answered by the loud clangor of the bands of the Zouaves over the ravine, playing "*Partant pour la Syrie*," and then on the other side by the grand, solemn notes of "*God Save the Queen*," from the Coldstream Guards.

Not to be outdone, the Russians struck up their national anthem, "*God save the Czar*," and the fire slackened on both sides for a full minute, while the opposing hosts shouted defiant cheers to each other across the narrow but deathly space that separated them.

And then, suddenly, the deep, sullen booming of distant cannon, *far off in the rear*, startled every one in the Allied lines.

The soldiers lying down turned involuntarily in their places, and looked in the new direction while the cannonade on the part of the Allies ceased as if by magic.

Then the distant booming, at first fitful and irregular, increased to a continuous roar, and announced to the dumbest mind that a terrible conflict must be going on there.

The officers of the iron Black Watch, for a moment, forgot their dignity, and looked gravely and anxiously at each other. As the cannonade increased, it became plain to every one that some great movement was being undertaken by the Russians, threatening the rear of the besiegers.

The sound came from the direction of their only base of supplies, six or seven miles off, poorly defended by a chain of redoubts, manned by Turks, and covering the harbor, where lay, as thick as in London Docks, the transports and provision ships that brought them all their supplies, to lose which was starvation, defeat, and possible surrender.

Over the mind of the most ignorant soldier the dread possibility flashed, as vividly as over the general himself. A murmur rose:

"*Balaklava is attacked!*"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MOSCOW ROAD.

AT noon of next day, a powerful dapple-gray horse, an English thoroughbred, worth many thousand rubles, stood before the door of Prince Gallitzin, waiting for his master. The horse was evidently a beast of wicked temper, from the way in which he showed the white of his eye and laid back his ears, when any one approached him suddenly. At such times, his tail would shrink in close to his haunches, and the animal cowered down, looking the embodiment of vice, ready to kick like a steam-engine. Such was the result of his early English education among grooms, and the same peculiarities had gained him the name of Chert (the Devil) among the prince's grooms.

Presently, however, down the steps came the tall, soldierly form of Gallitzin, closely buttoned up in the dark-green undress uniform of a retired general, switching his boot with his riding-whip.

"Let him go, Vassili," he said to the groom at the horse's head. "I don't fear old Chert. He knows me."

And he walked fearlessly up to the vicious brute, talking to it in a tone of kindness, under which Chert instantly became quiet and docile, allowing his master to mount him without a kick, a feat no other man in St. Petersburg could have performed.

Then the old prince gathered up his reins, spoke to Chert, and away went the dapple-gray stallion down the street, at a killing pace, toward the Moscow gate.

The prince was by no means unarmed. In either holster of his military saddle reposed a Colt's revolver, and the old nobleman could snuff a candle at twenty paces with a bullet.

The few idlers that gathered round the steps of the palace to see the prince depart, had done so, merely attracted by the commanding grace of his demeanor. None of them dreamed that, in taking this seemingly ordinary morning ride, the proud old noble was knowingly risking his life.

And yet such was the case.

Gallitzin was fully aware that three police spies stood at different parts of the street to watch him, and knew that, if he gave any offense by his actions, he would be arrested on one pretense or another.

Accordingly, ere Chert had taken twenty bounds at the pace at which he started, he was sharply reined up by his master, and compelled to proceed at a slower rate—an indignity which he resented by jumping from side to side, plunging and rearing, in a manner few horsemen could have sat out, undisturbed.

But the prince could see several mounted police on the way to the Moscow gate, and was careful to give them no excuse for stopping him for furious riding.

As he passed the first, the man called out to him:

"Be careful, prince. Remember the ukase on fast riding."

"When I ride over eight miles an hour, stop me!" cried Gallitzin. "Till then, keep your tongue from insulting a Boyar of Russia."

As he spoke, out of a cross-avenue rode a mounted officer, followed by several orderlies, all at full speed.

The officer passed by Gallitzin, waved his hand, and cried:

"Ride with me, prince. I am on duty."

In a moment Gallitzin was beside him and dashing toward the Moscow gate at full gallop; for in the officer he had recognized the czarévitch himself.

And the czarévitch was exempt from the ukase and all his immediate friends.

Gallitzin laughed as they galloped along, for the mounted police drew back and saluted the heir apparent, giving up all notion of stopping him or his companion.

In another five minutes they were through the gate, and the grand duke waved his hand in farewell, as he turned to the right, and left Gallitzin.

The old prince lifted his hat and bowed, spoke to Chert, and away went horse and man on the way to Moscow, now out of the city limits.

Chert went magnificently. All his vice and temper had disappeared in the tremendous burst of energy with which he covered mile after mile of the dusty road, and he fairly seemed to fly.

Not till ten miles intervened between himself and St. Petersburg, a distance accomplished in half an hour, did the gallant horse slacken his pace, and then only in obedience to his master's hand.

The old prince pulled him up to a walk, and allowed Chert to breathe and snort away his temporary distress, while Chert's rider keenly inspected a country ox-cart, which was slowly rumbling along behind its slow team, on the road before him.

Gallitzin, experienced in police intrigue, suspected the innocent looking ox-cart.

There were too many men with it.

Four in all, one drove the cart, another lay on the hay which loaded it, two more trudged alongside, with scythes over their shoulders.

The prince walked his horse slowly along about a hundred yards in rear of the cart, and the cart stopped.

The old noble halted, too.

"So that's your game, is it?" he muttered. "Let us see if it will succeed."

He looked all round the landscape. It was a flat plain like the steppe, but dotted with patches of forest. Not a human being was in sight save those with the ox-cart, and over a distant belt of scrubby pine wood rose the green spire of a little country church.

That spire marked the center of a village on Gallitzin's own estates.

He might have reached it by a cut across country, but to do so would imply a fear of the men with the ox-cart, which he disdained to show.

Suddenly taking his resolution, he drew a pistol from his holster, and dashed down straight at the ox-cart at full speed. As he had anticipated, all four men strung themselves across the road to dispute his progress, and the men with the scythes ran forward with uplifted weapons, as if resolved to hamstring the horse at least.

Down on the spies thundered the gallant old prince, till within ten paces, when he suddenly threw Chert on his haunches, wheeled sharp to the left, and fired three shots into the group as he galloped away into the forest.

One of the men fell, and the rest uttered fearful oaths as they ran after the daring veteran.

A man threw the sharp scythe he bore, with deadly aim, at the prince's horse, the blade cutting a gash in the animal's haunch, but not crippling it, as luck would have it.

Gallitzin scraped his way past safely, and then halted.

With pitiless accuracy he fired the nine shots remaining to him at the three men still unwounded, who were all unprovided with firearms.

When they fled, he pursued them mercilessly.

Late that evening Prince Gallitzin rode in at the Moscow gate of St. Petersburg, on a black Arab, and the first person he met was the minister of police in his carriage.

"I have just received important news from Sebastopol," quoth Gallitzin, as he passed. "If you want to hear it, ask his imperial highness, the czarévitch, whom I just met."

Gorloff ground his teeth, as the prince rode off, laughing.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE POLISH OFFICER.

In front of General Pelissier's quarters stood a dark, iron-gray barb, with an officer's accoutrements. It was held by a turbaned Spahi,* the orderly on duty. General Pelissier was the French second in command; and at the moment the cannonade began he was seated in his tent, talking to a very handsome young officer in the dress of a captain of Guides, whose downy black mustache hardly redeemed his face from effeminacy.

"And so you think I make a good cavalier, general," said the youthful officer, smiling.

"I think you a devilish deal too handsome," said the old soldier, stroking his white mustache, and scanning the other critically; "but still I will say this, that if I had a daughter—which God forbid, for women are troublesome creatures—I'd think twice before trusting her anywhere near you. Do you know that you have an infernally rakish air, my dear captain—ah—I forget—"

"Captain Count Nadetski," said the young officer, laughing. "You must not forget that, general, seeing that you yourself recommended me for my commission."

Pelissier grinned. He was a tough old soldier, given to much bad language, and innumerable cigarettes and "*petites verres*," (*anglice*, "drinks," "horns," "smiles," "eye-openers," etc.)

"Captain Count Nadetski," he said "I am glad, for my own sake, that the countess has gone back to Varna. Were she here, I think you would make me feel uncommonly jealous. But since you are her—"

"Brother," said Nadetski, as the other hesitated; "and hating Russia as fiercely as only a Pole can, general."

"*Ma foi*, it needs no glasses to see that, count. But, being her brother, and the countess being my good friend, I now ask you, what do you propose to do for us?"

"More than all your spies can do for you," said the young Pole, boldly. "I can go inside the Russian lines, and find all their plans, ay, even to what passes in Menschikoff's cabinet."

"Good promises, count," said Pelissier, dryly. "When you have executed them, I will promise you promotion. What do you propose to do first; and have you any thing to tell me now?"

"I have much, general," said the Pole, calmly. "Had I not been detained so long at the outposts, the news would be invaluable. As it is it may enable you to save the army. To-day, probably by this time, General Liprandi, with thirty thousand troops, will attack Balaklava, where he expects to drive out the Turks like sheep, take the redoubts, and destroy every ship in the harbor."

Pelissier started up.

"Are you mad, young man! To-day! Why—"

Boom! boom! boom! the terrible cannonade opened, and the battle was begun, as Pelissier spoke.

"That is only a feint," said Nadetski, quietly. "They expect to divert your troops from Balaklava by threatening a sally. Keep cool, general. You'll hear them at Balaklava soon."

The general stood listening to the fast-increasing cannonade in silence for some minutes. He heard the drums and bugles calling to arms, and the shouts of the Russians threatening a sally, but he hardly heeded them, in the light of the news he had just received.

"Will you dare to take your statement to Raglan?" he asked abruptly of Nadetski. "Remember, I don't know you, young man. You're devilish like a young friend of mine, to be sure, and bear strong recommendations, but if I act on your advice, I must strip my front to protect Balaklava, which may not really be assailed. Raglan is nearer there. Will you dare go to him?"

* In the French cavalry the Spahis occupy the place that the better known Zouaves and Turcos did among the foot soldiers. They are Africans, Moors, Arabs, etc., with a few Frenchmen, and officered by French for the most part. They wear the Oriental dress similar to the Zouaves, with long boots instead of shoes and gaiters. The renowned Gerard, "the Lion Killer," belonged to this corps. The "Guides" were a gorgeously uniformed Hussar regiment, part of the Imperial Guard, (now abolished, 1873), whose duties consisted in furnishing escorts, couriers, etc., to the highest officers of France.

Nadetski rose.

"With pleasure, general; but I warn you that you are losing time. The attack will not be here, but at Balaklava."

"Go and tell Raglan," said Pelissier, obstinately. "Here, I'll write a note recommending you, and he shall take the responsibility. I'll send the light cavalry, but not a man else, that's flat."

The veteran general sat down and scrawled a hasty note, the cannonade increasing every moment, while the *spang!* of an occasional bursting shell came nearer and nearer every time, though the general's quarters were far behind the lines.

When it was finished the young Pole took it with a grave bow, and left the tent, when the French general called for his horse and rode down toward the trenches.

The captain of Guides, however, rode in exactly the opposite direction as soon as he had mounted the gray barb. The animal dashed along at a rapid, easy gallop, skirting the French right, and going toward the rear of the English, where, on a gentle hill, stood a long, rambling cluster of cottages, over which waved the flag of Lord Raglan, the English commander.

As Nadetski approached, he saw the white-headed general, surrounded by his staff, sitting on horseback on a commanding eminence, surveying the long white line of smoke that hid the front of Sebastopol.

The count galloped up, himself the most gorgeous figure in sight, with his green dolman, turreted pelisse, wide scarlet trowsers, and fur cap so loftily plumed.

Raglan nodded curtly in answer to the salute, and hastily tore open the note. As soon as he read it his face changed, and he beckoned the young Pole near.

"Gentlemen," he said to his staff officers, who were clustering near, "fall back fifty paces. I wish to speak to this officer."

In a moment they were alone, and Raglan asked:

"Well, sir, what news? General Pelissier tells me you have important news. What is it?" In a few words Nadetski repeated his story.

The English commander mused; but his musings were suddenly interrupted by the opening gun at Balaklava, followed by the total cessation of the allied fire.

Raglan listened, and a look of fear and anxiety came over his usually calm old face.

"The news is true," he muttered. "Why did it not come five hours sooner? Then we might have saved the redoubts; now—"

As he spoke he looked over the intervening country toward Balaklava. From where they were, the smoke of conflict was seen rising, rising over the crest of a hill, while the booming cannon became incessant.

They could see, from where they were, the slope of the hill at Balaklava covered with dark, moving masses, edged with white smoke, announcing the Russian columns moving to attack the Turkish batteries.

Then at last the English general seemed to shake off his momentary apathy and roused himself.

"Those Turks fight well behind walls. They'll hold them till we can succor them. Colonel, here, quick!"

He beckoned to one of his staff who galloped up.

"To Lord Lucan instantly. Tell him to saddle up every thing and trot to Balaklava. The enemy are attacking in force. Away, sir."

Away went the officer at full speed, and Raglan beckoned another.

"My compliments to Sir John Cathcart. Tell him to take his division to Balaklava in quick time. Order the Guards to follow him. All to report to me there. Quick, sir."

Away went number two, as hard as he could tear, and Raglan turned to Nadetski.

"Why didn't you come here before, sir? Your news is only in time to be too late. Had I seen you at sunrise, I would have had you made a colonel."

"Blame the dock-officers, my lord," said Nadetski, in very good English. "I came in by sea last night, and they kept me with their papers till now."

"How did you know all this, sir?" asked Raglan abruptly, not listening to the other's explanation. "You wear the uniform of France. How know you the Russian plans? Who are you?"

"Does your lordship remember hearing of the Countess of Ivanoff?" asked Nadetski, quietly.

"Ay, ay; St. Arnaud, Canrobert, and Pelissier, were all crazy about her in Constantinople," grumbled the general. "Because she had a pretty face, and was a Pole, they thought her a great acquisition. I didn't believe in her. But what of her?"

"Your lordship insisted on her leaving camp, suspecting her for a Russian spy," said Nadetski, quietly. "Well, my lord, this very day she is in Sebastopol, and it is from her that I have this news. I am her brother, her husband is a ferocious tyrant, but to serve Poland by humbling Russia, she dares Siberia and the knout, and I hold correspondence with her?"

"I thought the lady was a widow," said Raglan, dryly. "At least she told us so."

"She might as well be one, my lord," said the Pole. "All her kith and kin have abandoned her, and she lives every hour in dread of her life. You mistrust her, and yet she has this day sent you valuable information, for which you have not even thanks to give."

"You mistake," said the old general, calmly. "I thank you for your news, late as it is. Had it been earlier, I would have done more. I would have rewarded you."

"I ask for no rewards," said the young officer, haughtily. "I act for my own pleasure. But if you wish to get your news in time hereafter, I must be able to pass your lines at all times. Give me such a pass as I have from General Pelissier, and you shall never complain of tardy news again, I promise you."

"That is a reasonable request," said Raglan, kindly. "My secretary shall give you one, if you please. I regret that you were detained, sir, but now, if you have no more news, I must attend to my duties. I see Lucan is moving off."

"One moment, my lord!" cried Nadetski, hurriedly, as Raglan pointed to the steel helmets of the renowned Heavy Brigade, moving on the road below to Balaklava at a rapid trot. "Will you let me go with Lord Lucan as a volunteer, and give me a note to insure my proper treatment? I may be able to secure valuable information."

Raglan hesitated, but consented; and called up a staff officer.

Five minutes after, Captain Count Nadetski was galloping full speed toward the head of Lord Lucan's column, and the Highland brigade was taking a short cut toward Balaklava on the left, where the battle was raging around the redoubts.

Before they had traversed a mile of the seven, the Turks were seen fleeing out of the redoubts, in confusion, while the Russian standard waved on the crest of Balaklava Heights.

Nadetski uttered a low laugh, and then pulled up close to Lord Lucan, to whom he handed Raglan's note.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CHARGE.

GENERAL CYPRIANOFF sat on his horse at the North Valley, in rear of the great Russian Battery, watching the motions of the enemy, and near the commander-in-chief.

The Light Brigade had just commenced their charge.

"Those fellows come straight, Ivan; but they must swerve before they reach us," said the commander to his general of artillery.

Cyprianoff watched them keenly before he answered. Then he shut up his glass.

"I think they have made a mistake," he said, quietly. "They have no leader on the other side, or the leader is a fool. *They are coming straight toward us.*"

Then he galloped down to his principal battery and sternly directed its fire on the devoted column. At the same moment from Causeway Ridge and the hills opposite the guns opened, firing in salvos, six at a time.

And now commenced that terrible drama of death and heroic folly, when twenty thousand men stood at their ease, slaughtering six hundred advancing to attack them in their strongest point.

A white pall of smoke, through which the red flashes of artillery shone out every instant, marked the horse-shoe line that embraced those devoted horsemen in a clasp of death.

Cyprianoff sat in his saddle on a hill behind the battery, deep columns of cavalry waiting grimly behind him, smoke veiling the field, nothing but smoke in front, nothing but waiting lines of gray-coated cavalry behind.

Silence in the Russian ranks, silence amid the oncoming English. Nothing but the sharp, snapping reports of the brazen guns in that deathly circle. When the breeze blew aside the smoke at intervals, through the thin haze you could see the two galloping squadrons of the first line coming on, behind a single figure on a chestnut horse, a figure blazing with gold all over his breast. Then the guns flashed out death once more, and thicker clouds of smoke hid the English.

Cyprianoff set his teeth as he watched.

"They will take the battery," he muttered.

"Oh, if I were only in command! Why don't they advance and annihilate the madmen?"

Again the breeze blew aside the smoke.

The devoted squadrons, as steady as ever, were close to the guns.

Cyprianoff noticed that they were each a mere handful now.

He looked at his gunners; they were working like madmen.

He looked behind him, for he heard the thunder of hoofs.

The Russian cavalry were wheeling about.

In an instant he, too, had wheeled, and was galloping after them, shouting, imploring them to turn back, that the day was their own. It was all in vain. They were not fleeing in fear—but their general had ordered them to fall

back, and they were obeying, with all the wooden precision of machines.

Then, even while the retreat was coming to an end, under the hoarse commands of the officers, Cyprianoff heard a loud, fierce shout of joy behind him, and the battery became silent.

Then he knew that the apparently hopeless charge had succeeded thus far. The battery was taken!

A moment later, the brilliant figure he had noticed before dashed out of the smoke all alone and came galloping toward the dense masses of Russian cavalry.

It was Cardigan himself, the first man in, and all alone.

Cyprianoff drew his sword and dashed forward.

"Surrender, my lord," he cried, in English. "You've done well, but you're surrounded."

For all answer the old earl wheeled his horse, just as several Cossacks from the flanks came riding at him.

He did not speak a word, but he galloped back through the battery just as the shouts of a fresh assault announced the arrival of the second English line, what was left of it.

Cyprianoff saw the swaying Russians halt once more. That cavalry had not charged that day. They had stood still to be butchered, under the guidance of a leader as incompetent as Lucan himself, though in a different way.

Then, in little staggering knots, the mad English horsemen came driving through the smoke, and a chance medley fight took place, wherein the desperate horsemen were surrounded and cut down, or made their way out of the fight to the rear, wounded and bleeding.

Cyprianoff himself had just interposed to save the life of an officer who was down, while several Cossacks prepared to spear him, when he heard a loud clamor close by.

Looking there, he perceived a young officer, in the gorgeous uniform of the French Guides, fighting for his life against several enemies. His hat was off, and his black hair was floating in the air in a confusion of clustering curls, while his face was streaked with blood.

"Hold your hands, dogs!" shouted the young general, dashing forward. "Surrender, monsieur, and I will save you."

Then, as the savage-looking Cossacks drew back, the French officer dropped his sword, wavered in his saddle, and would have fallen but for Cyprianoff, who caught him in his arms as he dropped back, senseless.

What was it caused the Russian general to start and utter that sudden cry of terror as he looked in the face of that young officer?

It was the face of a mere boy, dark and handsome, with a downy black mustache and long, curling hair. The blood that covered it could not disguise the regular outline.

But Cyprianoff seemed to recognize that face as something known to him. All the whirl of battle going on round him seemed to fade from his memory as he drew the slight form of the now insensible young officer out of the saddle and carried it off away from the field.

He forgot his duty, forgot everything round, and galloped away to the rear, out of the din of conflict, till he halted in a little hollow back of the lines.

Then he looked round for the first time. Stiff Sergeant Potapoff had pulled up within ten paces, and awaited his commander's orders, like a statue of stolid silence.

CHAPTER XXV.

PRINCESS GALLITZIN.

THE city of Petersburg was gay with sleighs, the bells ringing in one universal burst of melody from the harness of prancing horses, while orderlies and escorts of dragoons were galloping to and fro in the streets, following muffled-up officers in long, gray overcoats and high boots, who wore spiked helmets, and galloped as if their lives depended upon it, although they were merely on the most ordinary parade duty.

The outer court of the winter palace was crowded with sleighs, for a grand levee was being held to commemorate the great victory of Balaklava, and the czar was said to be in good humor.

In the midst of the crowds that promenaded the spacious saloons up-stairs after being presented to the emperor, there was but one couple in which we have any particular interest.

Count Gorloff and the Princess Gallitzin had met as if by chance in the crowd, and the princess had excused herself to her escort, and taken the count's arm.

In the solitude of a great crowd both were conversing eagerly in low tones, and their conversation ran on this wise:

PRINCESS. Have you discovered anything, Alexis? I suppose you have or the czar would have kept his word long ago.

GORLOFF. I have discovered nothing.

PRINCESS. Nothing! Great Heavens, do you know the penalty?

GORLOFF. I remember too well—Siberia. But what of that? A man cannot do impossibilities. I have done what I could—lied. The czar believes that I know all. I have invented

a story to account for the news your husband receives.

PRINCESS. And how does he receive the story?

GORLOFF. Believes it. Moreover, I have hit on a way of tapping your prince when he is full of news. I find that he always tells it to the czarévitch; so I have bribed every one round the young fool. In this way I got the first news to the emperor of Balaklava. My spies heard the prince tell the czarévitch; and, oh, Sergia, it was balm to my heart to be able to say to the emperor, "Your majesty's secret service is in full possession of all the news up to yesterday."

PRINCESS. My brave Alexis! I, too, have good news to tell you. I have found where the prince goes.

GORLOFF. Where, where? Speak low.

PRINCESS. To the village of Beloi Gorod, on his own estates. I have followed him myself. He goes into the old church in the village, and remains there several hours, when news has to be got. You remember, Alexis, I told you he was a devil. How else could he get news from a thousand miles off in a deserted old church?

GORLOFF. What do you mean by deserted? Is there another church in the village?

PRINCESS. Surely. This is an old stone-building with the roof half gone. The villagers are afraid to go near it at night, because it is surrounded with graves.

GORLOFF. And he goes there? You say you followed him? Did he find you out?

PRINCESS. I cannot say, except this. I began to suspect that this mystery was connected with Beloi Gorod, and I resolved to pay a visit there, openly. A week ago I ordered my carriage, and drove thither. The peasants welcomed me with delight, and I began to question them when they had last seen the prince. But immediately, to my surprise, they all became as dumb as oysters. If it had been you they would have beaten you, Alexis; but a woman has two strings to her bow at all times. I pretended not to notice it and presently called a little child to me. I gave him a silver ruble, and kissed him, and asked him about his master. The little one artlessly said, "Yes, our lord the prince was here yesterday, and went to the old church to talk to the devil, who always gets into empty churches. And my father told me to keep it secret, or he'd beat me. But you won't let him, will you, princess?"

GORLOFF. Good! You are a jewel, Sergia. Now I will find out something at last. What did you then?

PRINCESS. I sent for the child's father, and frightened him out of his wits. He swore that he would not hurt the child, and entreated me to save him from the anger of the prince, who had promised the knout to any one who should prattle about his visit. I praised them all for their silence, and advised them to keep the secret still, for it had not leaked out of the family yet, I being princess.

GORLOFF. You did well. Now I have some news for you. The source of all this news is—Ivan Cyprianoff.

The princess turned deadly pale at the count's words, and looked into his face with a strange expression. The minister of police smiled sardonically.

"You need not fear, Sergia," he said, in a hard, restrained voice, "that I shall hurt him, now. Time was when I was jealous enough; but that is all past. I do not fear the boy now. He hates you as much as you once loved him; and you hate him, too. But that is not all. Ivan Cyprianoff has a friend in the camp of the allies, and that friend is a woman."

The princess turned paler and paler.

"Let me sit down," she gasped; "I am not well."

With rapid tact Gorloff escorted her to a seat in one of the deep windows, where the princess seemed for a moment as if she were about to faint. Gorloff covered her from view as he stood beside her, looking down on the throng of equipages in the street, the unheeding crowd in the saloon noticing nothing. Presently she said, faintly:

"Tell me the rest. Who is the woman?"

"An escaped prisoner, Anna Bronk by name," said Gorloff.

The princess looked relieved.

"Anna Bronk? Oh, some German Pole, I suppose. Ivan was always disposed to love the Poles. Who is this Anna Bronk? How did she escape? Was she an exile?"

Gorloff cast a keen glance down at her from between half-closed lids, as if he suspected her ignorance to be feigned; but the princess was obviously sincere.

"Anna Bronk was an exile in the province of Tobolsk," he said. "She escaped into the Kirghiz country, being only under slight surveillance at the time. The Caspian guard-boat caught her and took her over to the Caucasus, where she again escaped to the Circassians. Now she has turned up in the allied camp, as a Polish countess, and one of my spies has detected Ivan Cyprianoff in correspondence with her."

The princess set her teeth and her eye flashed. "She shall go like the other," she said, savagely. "Alexis, if you wish to retain your

place, kill me this woman as you did the other. He shall not be happy. I swore it once, when he scorned me, and I will keep my oath."

"Be under no alarm," said the count, shortly. "She shall die."

Then he looked furtively into the crowd around.

"Your husband, where is he?" he asked in a low tone.

"He has gone to Beloi Gorod," she said.

Gorloff started, and muttered hastily:

"You should have told me before. I am going after him. I shall not trust this business to another any longer. Will you come with me now? There is no time to lose if I would meet him on the way back."

The princess made no sort of objection. She rose and took the minister's arm, and they left the great saloon, passing between ranks of gigantic cuirassiers down the marble staircase, and entering the magnificent sleigh of the princess.

Gorloff dismissed his own equipage with a sign, and they drove rapidly to the Gallitzin palace, where the princess was safely deposited. Then the vehicle conveyed the minister to his own residence, where he dismissed the coachman with a splendid gratuity and entered his private cabinet.

An hour afterward, a small sledge, drawn by a single horse, and containing a greasy-looking Tartar peddler, drove out of the Moscow gate and took the road toward Beloi Gorod.

The peddler was one of the better class of itinerant merchants who buy their stocks at the great market of the Gostinnoi Dvor, and retail them to the villagers of Great Russia at a profit of five hundred per cent.

This peddler carried a little of everything, from ribbons to relics of the saints, and wore the high black cap of a Tartar from Astrachan.

Very few people would have recognized, under the bush of straggling hair and beard that almost hid his features, the smooth face of the Minister of Police. But Gorloff it was, on his way to Beloi Gorod, to find out for himself the mystery of the ruined church.

Before he had gone an hour over the snow-crust, that sparkled smooth and bright before him, he met a handsome sledge, with three fine horses at the gallop.

Prince Gallitzin sat in the rear seat, muffled in furs, and tipped his cap courteously in answer to the profound salute of the pretended merchant.

Then they parted, the prince for Petersburg, Gorloff for the village of Beloi Gorod or "White Town."

The prince did not seem to have recognized the spy.

CHAPTER XXVI.

RUNNING THE GUARD.

OCTOBER was over, and with it the results of Balaklava. The Russians had withdrawn from their conquests, the Allies had assured their position, the din of battle was over, and the siege dragged its weary length along once more.

After the fight, endless disputes as to whom to blame for the blunder. Result, it was laid on the dead, who could not reply. Poor Nolan, whose living tongue might have showed the whole truth, was silent in his grave.

In the trenches before Sebastopol the Highland Brigade lay once more alongside of the Zouaves, and the evening sun lighted up a quiet expanse of white camps. The cannonade was desultory, and fitful as usual, and there was no picket firing.

Piper McPherson, in his shirt-sleeves, with a short pipe in his mouth, sat on the side of the Woronzoff ravine, with his legs dangling over, while he talked to his old friend Pichot. Both were off duty, and enjoying themselves as only soldiers off duty can, in perfect lazy happiness.

"It is true, *mon ami*," said Pichot, replying to the Scot. "There is no woman at headquarters, I assure you. I was on guard, and my round took me to Pelissier's tent, but there was not a sign of a petticoat there. So that you must be mistaken."

"And I tell ye, mon," said Sandy, positively, "that I canna be mistaken. When I ha'e ance clappit my een on callant or quean, I'd ken them again, gin 'twere twenty year efter. I dinna say that the bonny leddy is na gane, noo, but I'll be dom'd—and that's an unco strang word for a douce body that gangs to kirk regular, Peesho—gin I did na see the vara leddy we had sae muckle fash to get awa' fra the Turkey-men in Constantinople, sitting in the French general's tent, not three weeks syne, and ne'er a lassie to keep her company."

Pichot shrugged his shoulders.

"*Helas, mon ami*, I do not doubt it. The *pauvre demoiselle*, she has to make up for the time she was imprisoned by the *sacrrre Turques*. It is not our affair."

"Eh, God save us, are ye daft, Peesho?" said Sandy, sharply. "What wad an honest woman be doin' in a sojer's tent? Mon, it gars me blasphem to hear ye gang that gate. Our affair! And wad no ye tak' shame to yerself, for resk-

in' yer life as ye did, to gat a light o' love quean out o' the place whaur she cudna do harm, and pit her in anither, whaur she *micht* do a waird o' mischief?"

"Eh, *mon Dieu*, what you cry out for like dat, *mon brave*? How can such a *belle demoiselle* harm us?"

"Mon, ye canna jist troost a randy quean like her. They'd a muckle deal rather lee than tell the truth, Peesho. Wha kens but what she may be a Rooshian spy, efter a'?"

"*Espion Russe*!" ejaculated Pichot, amazedly. "Why, you are beginning to talk sense at last, *mon brave*. Why did you not say it before?"

"Because I wasna sure," said the Scot, cautiously; "but I weel say that it's unco suspicious, Peesho, to see a leddy in silks and jewels, around headquarters."

"Well, but, granting all that, *mon ami*, she is gone."

Sandy turned round to the Zouave with deep meaning.

"Hoo d'ye ken she *winna coom back*, mon? I mind she was a braw leddy, and ye ken that she gev us twa rings, that she said wad pre-sairve us gin we gotten *preesoners to the Rooshians*. Noo, mon, she maun be a great leddy for her rings to be kened, and gin she war a great leddy, it's unco certain that she's efter nae gude in our lines."

"*Mon ami*," said Pichot thoughtfully, "there is reason in thy words, but what are we to do? Shall we go and tell the general of our suspicions?"

"Na, na," said the piper scornfully, "thao generals are sic high and mighty bodies, they wadna listen to a puir body, gin he didna bring them some real news. But I'll tell ye what, Peesho, gin ye can get leave, the night, you and I'll rin the guaird, and jist gang spyin' on oor ain luke-out, roon the richt of the army. Whiles I canna get it aff my mind that the Rooshians are coomin' in on us fra that side ance mair, before the winter sets in."

"*Mon ami*, I will go with thee," said Pichot, simply.

Sandy looked at the sun, which was dipping the lower half of its orb and fast disappearing.

"Gang hame and pit on yer capote," he said, quietly. "We'll need nae airms but the cauld steel, for we maun be still as mice. Brung yer bagnet, but leave the auld rifle."

Pichot nodded and ran down the declivity to the camp of his people, while Sandy returned to his tent, and invested himself in his warm jacket and great-coat, for the night was fast growing chilly, in foretaste of the coming frost.

He put on his low blue bonnet, discarding the lofty feather head-dress, and took for arms dirk and pistol only.

Then he stalked forth into the gathering dusk, just as "retreat" roll-call was over, for he heard the sergeant's harsh voice saying:

"Break ranks—march!"

"Absent frae roll-call, Sandy," he said to himself. "That'll be three days' guard for ye, gin the major hasn't got a cauld in his heid, sae as to tak' Black Geordie's voice for mine whin he answers. Ye'd best be awa', mon, or the major will be efter ye."

He threw himself down the side of the ravine, and speedily heard the low voice of Pichot in the dark gully.

"Is it thou, *mon Ecossais*?"

"Ay, ay, it's me, mounseer," said Sandy, dryly: "and I'm thinkin' we'll both catch it to-morrow mornin' gin we dinna feend oot something aboon the enemy."

"Which way are you going?" whispered the Zouave.

"To the rear, of course," said Sandy. "Ye wadna weesh to rin the guard whaur baith sides wad be firin' at ye. It's unco slack to the rear."

Without another word the two companions stole off up the ravine, keeping in the bottom, and stooping low to avoid being seen. As night came on, a lively picket-firing sprung up along the front of the trenches, and the racket assisted their designs. In a short time they stood in the plain outside of the camp guards, free to pursue their way along the rear of the allied armies.

"'Tis lucky we have not the Zouaves before us," remarked the French corporal, as they heard the drowsy tones of the sentries around the camp of the Guards, answering each other in the long drawn "All's well."

Sandy bristled up at the implied comparison.

"And why so, mounseer?" he asked, sharply. "*Ma foi*, we should not hear them," said Pichot, shrugging. "They do not call to one another like those droff Anglais. You would hear but one *click, click*, and then *hallel! Ma foi*, it is not so easy to run guard of the Zouaves."

"And how did ye do it, yerself?"

"Ah, *mon ami*, I had a friend, Biscard, he is on guard, and he pass me in. To-morrow night I could not get in, for Pierre Bonard is on, and he and I have fought together."

"Aweel," said Sandy, dryly, "gin we dinna get in till to-morrow night, it's my opeenion that we'll baith be returned as deserters, and that wadna suit us. Na, na, Peesho, we maun baith be in camp before daylight, or 'twill be the waur for us. Now, whust, mon, we're com-

in' unco close to the peckets. The Cauld-streams are here, round the redoots."

The comrades had been skirting the rear of the English camps, on the right of the Allied lines, and had passed the last.

Now before them lay the open unknown country, where the enemy were supposed to hold dominion, and the outposts were men of the Coldstream Guards, whose line fronted toward the ruins of the little Tartar village of Inkernnan.

Sandy advanced very cautiously now. He knew the exact position of the picket line, but he did not know how wide awake the sentries were.

It proved that they were regular John Bulls, drowsy at night.

Pichot, who was crouching to the ground as he stole forward, pulled the piper's sleeve.

"Yonder," he whispered, "is the picket sentry. He is asleep on his musket."

Sandy looked; and sure enough, there stood a huge Guardsman, with his bear-skin shako looming up against the sky. He was leaning on his musket, and snoring, in a way that plainly told the whole story. The Guardsman was asleep on his post, standing.

Sandy and the Zouave stole swiftly past till they were lost in the darkness, when the piper picked up a clod of turf and stole back several paces.

"Take that, ye sleepy-headed type," he muttered, as he flung the turf at the sleeping sentry. Then he turned and ran.

The next minute the growling voice of big Tom Higgs roared:

"Who threw that clout? Blast ye, I ain't asleep."

The two comrades laughed as they sped into the darkness. They had run the pickets.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE OUTPOSTS.

THE English pickets were indeed passed; and before the comrades lay a level plateau about a quarter of a mile in breadth, bordered by precipitous ravines, a sort of isthmus, that connected the ground occupied by the Allies with the open country beyond the Tchernaya.

"Noo, Peesho," said the piper, in a low voice, "ye ken we're in a bad place gin we coom across the Rooshians; and we'll coom on them pretty soon. Be ready to drap, mon. We'll be at the Tchernaya in anither half-hour. Ye ken it rins into the harbor."

"*Tiens, mon brave*," said Pichot, halting. "Where are we going, and what are we to do. We are all free now."

"We're jist boond for the Rooshian peckets whaever they may be," said Sandy; "and once there we'll luke oot to tak' a *preesoner* that kens something. Peesho, ye ken we Hie landers are said to ha'e the geest o' second sight—it's what yer Frenchers ca' *clairvoyance*, ye ken—and I canna get it oot of my mind that I ha'e seen that bonny leddy ower here. I's awa' till I find her."

Pichot stopped his companion as he was going on.

"Monsieur McPherson," he said, gravely, "is it possible that you have come out here on a fancy like that?"

Sandy turned on him peevishly.

"Hoot awa', mon, ye want to ken ae thing a body kens. Weel, if ye maun ken, I ha'e *grave reason to suspeshon* that the bonny leddy's a Rooshian spy, and that she cams here ilka nicht. I ha'e seen her. Noo, will ye gang wi' me?"

"I will," said the Zouave, reassured.

Then the two plodded on through the darkness over the neck of land without meeting a soul, and finally stood on the edge of the steep descent that led down to the river Tchernaya.

"Doon, mon, doon, and creep over the ridge like a snake," said Sandy, in a whisper. "Gin there's Rooshians here, they'll see us against the sky line."

Both dropped on their faces, then crawled slowly to the edge of the declivity, and looked over. Below them, in a deep valley, the white gleam of water and the audible wash of the current showed where the river lay.

Both strained their eyes in vain to find any sign of human occupancy. The Tchernaya valley was empty.

By mutual consent both men crawled over the edge and some little distance down the declivity before they ventured to rise, and only then behind the shelter of a thicket.

Then they stole cautiously down toward the bridge that they knew crossed the river. A regular road ran down to it, and they crept cautiously along in the ditch beside it, stopping to listen at every few steps.

Silent as every thing was, they were not fools enough to believe that the place was there fore empty.

The outposts of an army are not wont to make much noise.

Presently they were in the ditch, at the side of the road next to the bridge; and, by stooping low down, brought the outline of the picturesque stone structure partly against the sky line.

The piper pinched the Zouave's arm, and pointed.

The dim outline of a Cossack on guard, with his long spear upright in the air, occupied the summit of the arch.

The vedette was looking straight before him, with the stolid air peculiar to the mechanical Russian soldier. He had evidently neither seen nor heard them.

Without a word Sandy and Pichot stole forward, still down the course of the side ditch, till they had put the abutments of the old stone bridge between them and the Cossack. The bridge was an old single-arched affair, where the roadway in the center necessarily rose high above the extremities; and thus, on a dark night, a person by the abutments was quite out of sight.

In a minute more the Scot and the Zouave stood on the banks of the little river under the arch itself, for the long dry season had lowered the water considerably.

They did not dare to speak now. It would not do to presume too far on the stolidity of the Cossack.

Sandy pointed across the stream and Pichot nodded. The Scot was just about to wade in, when he heard the hoofs of a horse coming at a slow trot over the stony road at the other side. Instantly both halted and stole back to the edge of the abutment to listen.

The approaching horseman had roused the Cossack. They could hear the tramp of his pony's feet as he wheeled around to confront the new-comer.

"It's the sairgent on his rounds, belike," said the piper, in a whisper. "Noo, gin we only understood the lingo, Peesho, we might find the countersign and walk in like gentlemen."

In a moment more the hoarse voice of the vedette was heard hailing, and the approaching horseman pulled up and answered.

The Cossack spoke again, and seemed to be repeating some directions to the other, for he spoke some time.

Then the strange horseman called out, as he rode on:

"Curasho!" (All right.)

The Cossack on the bridge seemed to think that it was by no means all right, however, for they could hear him shouting to the other in a warning tone, and at the same time came the ominous click of a pistol-lock.

The strange horseman, despite all, rode boldly down to the bridge, and then suddenly wheeled round and dashed into the river at the left of the bridge. Instantly, with a furious malediction, the Cossack dashed to the parapet of the bridge and fired his pistol at the other.

Sandy uttered a low exclamation of surprise. He had recognized in the figure in the water the low bear-skin shako and hanging jacket of a French chasseur, for even in that darkness the scarlet trousers were conspicuous.

"It's one of our ain officers, Peesho," he whispered, excitedly. "Belike he's been out on the same errand as yersel', mon. We mauna let the Rooshian kill him."

The piper drew his revolver as he spoke, and watched the figure of the Cossack on the bridge.

The officer in the water appeared not to have been hit, for he kept on his course across the stream without faltering, his horse being almost swimming deep by this time.

The Cossack, swearing away in Russian, galloped around to the further bank of the river, passing within four feet of the two crouching comrades without seeing them under the shadow of the abutment, and rode down to the water's edge to intercept the stranger.

Then Sandy and the Zouave rose, as if with one impulse, and suddenly rushed at the unwary vedette. In a single bound the athletic Highlander was alongside, as the Cossack halted by the river. The next moment his sinewy arm was round the other's throat, and he bore him backward from the saddle in the scientific manner of a professional garroter. In the very action Pichot seized him on the other side, and flourishing his sword-bayonet ferociously, compelled silence from the astonished and terrified man.

"Cut his weasand gin he says a word," said the piper, rapidly, as he turned to watch the man in the river; "I'm curious to know what you gay callant may be."

In the middle of the stream the gayly-uniformed horseman had halted, and now seemed undecided whether to advance or retreat.

"I thoct as muckle," growled Sandy, savagely, as he eyed the other with great distrust. "Yon's a spy, coming to rin oor guard as a French officer. Noo lat's see gin he wull."

The Highlander ran round, and in a twinkling was on the bridge and over the middle of the arch. He knew full well that there was danger, for the rest of the chain of vedettes must be near; but he was resolved to capture this mysterious stranger, if possible.

Over the middle of the arch he leaned, pistol in hand, and spoke in a low voice:

"Surrender, ye traitor tyke, or I'll riddle ye wi' bullets."

For answer the strange officer suddenly made his horse leap forward in the water, when he disappeared under the bridge. Just as he did it Sandy fired, and felt convinced that he had

struck the horse, for he heard a great splashing below.

Then he also heard a distant shouting, and the swift gallop of a horse on the Russian side of the river.

"We hae rousit the peockets, onyway," he muttered, as he turned discontentedly away, "and gin I'm no muckle mista'en we'll see something, noo."

He ran down the bridge to where he had left his comrade with the Cossack, and found that the latter had already bound and gagged his victim with his own belts. Then, seeing that the man in the river had reached the Russian shore, the piper did not fire again, but turned his attention to his own safety.

Dealing the Cossack's docile pony a cut with the Cossack's own whip, that sent it galloping away, the two comrades scrambled up the bank into a thicket, just as the tramp of horses came near.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE POLICE SPY.

THE village of Beloi Gorod was a representative Russian village, in the midst of a dead flat, many miles in extent, surrounded by straggling forests of stunted pine trees, in the midst of which stood the village fields around the village itself.

The houses were all long and low, with black thatched roofs, each in its own little garden, along the single street that composes the breathing space of the village, with a circular green in the center. A strong stockade ran round the whole place, so as to make it a complete fortification, not against man, but against the innumerable wolves that infest all Russia.

Gorloff, in his disguise, drove in at the open gate of the village, and was welcomed with effusion by the hospitable peasants, who crowded round to buy of him, and to proffer the shelter that was needed from the night fast approaching. Gorloff played his part well; and after selling out a great part of his stock at prices that astonished the peasants from their cheapness, accepted the hospitality of the elder of the village, old Michael Ivanovitch.

In a short time he was ushered into the elder's house, the largest in the place, and fronting on the green. Old Michael had been the elder for twenty-five years, and was the richest peasant there. As elder, he enjoyed autocratic rule over the village, and Gorloff knew that he was the best person to get news out of.

As soon as the simple supper was over, the vodka (brandy) and pipes were produced; and host and guest drew up beside the roaring fire that conquered the cold outside.

"And, now, friend peddler," said old Michael, when they had drunk a first glass, and lighted their pipes, "tell us of czar. Thou hast been around court. How does our czar look? Is he sad on account of these heathen barbarians that desolate the lands of the Crimea? Hast thou seen our czar?"

The Russian peasant, it may be observed, has an intense reverence and affection for the czar, even if he has never seen him, and always speaks of him in the familiar manner.

"Emperor" is to him a foreign title: "czar" is the czar who loves children, and whom they love.

"Czar Nicolai reviewed his guard yesterday," said the peddler. "He looked well and glad; for his faithful soldiers have beaten the accursed English at Balaklava; and Sebastopol defies them."

The elder filled a horn of vodka and rose. "God bless Czar Nicolai, and death to the invaders," he said.

Then he and the peddler drank in silence. The peddler, however, only appeared to drink. In reality he spilt most of his liquor on the ground. Michael Ivanovitch finished his to the last drop, and took nearly half a pint of raw brandy at that one swig. Thus it was no wonder that his tongue loosened.

"Thou art a royal peddler," he said, patronizingly; "and I doubt thou hast seen much in thy travels. Has thou ever seen the czar on his throne?"

"Ay, have I," said the peddler, readily; "and that many a time. But I saw only to-day one who looks finer than even the czar himself when he is in his full dress."

"And who was that?" inquired the elder.

"None other than the great Prince Gallitzin," said the peddler, in a tone of rapt enthusiasm. "There is a prince if you like! None of your new creations, but an old boyar, who draws his race from the time of the great Constantine."

Michael Ivanovitch rose and poured out a second horn of vodka. Then he said, with tears in his eyes:

"Friend peddler, thou art the finest fellow I ever met. Here is to our lord, Prince Gallitzin, and may he never see old age, but live forever with us!"

A second time the elder drained his horn, and when he sat down the peddler proceeded: "What! Is he the lord of this village? In truth I did not know it. Does he ever come to see you?"

"Ay, does he," said Michael, proudly; "and that very often. Our lord, the prince, loves his children of Beloi Gorod, and comes—why, he was here to-day; you must have met him going down."

"Ay, I did," said the peddler, carelessly; "but that was on the Moscow road. I knew not that he came from here. Why, what does he here?"

Michael Ivanovitch hesitated, but he was by this time very drunk, and correspondingly affectionate.

"Friend peddler," he hiccupped, "I love thee for thy looks and thy news. Swear to me that thou'll never tell a soul of the news, and I'll tell thee. The prince comes here—"

He leaned over and whispered mysteriously: "To talk to the devil in an empty church."

In spite of his skepticism, Gorloff started under his disguise, and ejaculated:

"Talk to the devil! How?"

Michael Ivanovitch shook his head with an air of great importance and mystery.

"The Gallitzins were always a wicked race," he said. "When Ivan the terrible was czar, there was but one man in all his kingdom that did not fear him. That was Nicolai Gallitzin, who used to burn his serfs alive, and made even the czar fear him. Our Alexis is a worthy son of the terrible Gallitzins. He can do anything. Thou knowest, brother peddler, that when a church is deserted by God, the devils flock into it. Well, we have such a church, struck by lightning. No one of us would dare go near it, without the priest to help us, but Alexis Gallitzin stays there whole days and nights at a time."

The peddler crossed himself piously. Then he filled both horns. "Let us drink confusion to the Black One," he said.

But Michael could not quite see the propriety of this. It was attacking, by implication, the family devil of the Gallitzins. "No, no," he said, wisely; "we had better not mention him, friend. He may be looking through the windows. But after all he is not so very bad, or the Gallitzin would not deal with him. Not that the prince would be afraid, were he ever so black."

"Then let us drink to the czar," said the peddler.

"Ay, ay, we'll do that."

The third half-pint finished Michael Ivanovitch, who was glad to stagger to bed. In twenty minutes after the whole village was asleep to all seeming.

The disguised minister rose up from the furs on which he had thrown himself, all dressed, like every one else. He listened to make sure that no one was awake, then went to the table and drained a half-pint of vodka, like so much water, ere he set out on his search in the intense Russian cold.

Then he softly raised the latch and stole out into the street, at the other end of which he had noticed the broken tower of the old church.

He passed the new one on his way, a simple little structure of stone, with a pointed spire, cased with shining green tiles. The old one was at the very end of the street, and thither went Gorloff. He could see that the roof was still good over the body of the church, but the tower was gone to ruin.

He heard no one about in the village, and therefore proceeded boldly to the front door of the church.

It was only lightly fastened, and he opened it and looked in. To his surprise a light was burning by the altar, in the way general to Greek and Roman churches.

Gorloff slipped softly in and closed the door. Instead of the intense cold that prevailed without, the atmosphere of the church was glowing with genial heat.

"This church is inhabited, and the superstitious fools have not dared to enter," thought the explorer.

But, except for the heat, there was no mark of the presence of human beings within the building.

The floor was perfectly bare, unbroken by the rigid lines of pews that prevail in our Western churches, for, all through the East, the congregation stands or sits on the floor.

The count stepped noiselessly to one side behind a pillar and looked around him. Rows of dark pictures covered the walls, of which he could see nothing but the frames, for the single candle on the altar only rendered the darkness visible.

Gorloff remained in his position for several minutes, scanning every corner of the edifice, and expecting momentarily to see some figure in motion start out.

But as nothing came, after a while he ventured to steal forward to another pillar. Still there was no sound. A dead stillness prevailed in the church, so complete that the faint distant cry of the wolf on the plains came plainly to the ear. The spy looked all around to find out the source of the mysterious heat, but for some time in vain.

At last, as he stole about on tiptoe, it forced itself on his notice by a blast of hot air which

came from a large square hole at the foot of a pillar.

"Hot air! A furnace!" he muttered. "Now there must be some one to attend to that. Who can they be?"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE COLUMN IN THE MIST.

THE venturesome soldiers knelt down in the thicket, hidden from view themselves, but in full sight of the bridge. Pichot had carried off the Cossack's short musket and boxes, and proceeded with perfect deliberation to draw the rammer and sound the piece. He found it loaded and capped.

With equal deliberation the Highland piper reloaded the empty chamber of his revolver, keeping a keen look-out on the bridge all the time.

The strange horseman in French uniform, who had puzzled them so much, had entirely disappeared by the time they got to the thicket, and they could not imagine what had become of him.

Instead of him, they distinctly saw a strong patrol of Cossacks come galloping down from the opposite heights to the bridge and halt there.

Several of the party rode across the bridge, as if to search for the vedette, and clustered together in a group, while voices were heard in excited consultation on the possible meaning of the disturbance.

The two comrades, from their shelter in the thicket, heard every word. But alas, they could not understand one of them.

The Russians seemed to be disputing on the probable fate of the sentry, and hesitating whether to advance or retreat. At last a clear voice shouted out some order, and the men who had halted on the further side of the bridge trotted over to join their officer. About a dozen of the Cossacks then formed an open skirmish line, slung their lances, and the clicking of carbine locks was plainly heard in the stillness.

The skirmish line rode slowly up the hill, skirting the road on either side, as if to search for a possible enemy.

"Stoop down, mon," whispered the piper, as he cowered closer into the brush.

The Zouave obeyed in silence, and the tramp and rustle of horsemen moving through the bushes came steadily on, and passed within twenty feet of them.

The left Cossack of the line might have even ridden over them, had not his horse shied away from penetrating the dense shrubby thicket in which they lay; and the soldier, reining the animal to the left, rode round the edge of the copse, in a blissful state of unconsciousness of their presence.

As far as concerned his own safety it was well, for he was covered by the Zouave's piece at the moment he swerved, and another step would have brought the Frenchman's finger to the trigger.

As it was, the beaters passed on up the hill without flushing the game, and the comrades breathed freely as they heard them in the distance grumbling to one another in tones that expressed their amazement and displeasure.

In a quarter of an hour later they came riding down the hill again, to report to their commander, and the comrades had the satisfaction of hearing them depart.

But two fresh vedettes were left at the further side of the bridge, instead of at the summit of the arch, and the comrades came to the conclusion that it was useless to try to penetrate any further that night.

"We'll ha'e to gang back, Peesho," said the piper, in a low tone; "but gin I c'u'd lay my grip on that fause loon i' the hussar busby, I wad be content to stay here till morn."

"Ma foi, mon ami, I will stay too," whispered Pichot. "He have not crossed de riviere yet, and we can see him ven he come. Eh, mon Ecossais, we will give him peppair."

Sandy chuckled, and settled himself down to watch. The corporal of Zouaves laid down on the ground and kept his keen eyes roaming up and down the banks on the other side of the river; and for some time a dead silence was preserved.

Then a distant sound slowly grew upon the ear, which gradually resolved itself into the unmistakable rumble of heavy vehicles on a road.

Sandy started.

"The Rooshians are movin', Peesho; yon's the rumble of guns. I tauld ye the Hieland second sicht wasna to be despised."

Pichot made no answer; he was listening too intently.

Sure enough the sound they heard was the unmistakable rumble of guns over a hard road, and, moreover, it was coming straight toward them.

After a while they could hear above it the dull murmur of voices that accompanies the movement of marching men, and Pichot whispered:

"Mon ami, it is well we are here. It is one grand movement."

After that neither of them said a word. They were too much absorbed in listening and watching.

They had a long time to wait, and the night grew colder and colder. A faint breeze came up from the Black Sea as the hours wore on, wafting dense clouds of mist up from the waters.

The thick creeping fog came curling in white wreaths up the valley, and gradually shrouded bridge and river in the thick veil. The rumble of the distant artillery grew plainer and plainer, the murmur of the crowd of footmen more distinct, while the regular clatter of horses' feet in great numbers began to be plainly heard.

As soon as the fog covered every thing, Sandy rose up.

"Come, Peesho," he said, dryly; "the de'ils are coming this way, and it's unco likely they'll find us gin we stay. Let's gang doon across the river, and tak' a luke at them and then gang hame."

Pichot quietly rose from his covert, and stole down the hill after his comrade, both keeping away from the bridge, where the unhappy Cossack still lay in the grass, bound and gagged.

In a very little time they were at the water's edge, when both lay down and listened.

The rumble of guns had ceased, and the murmur had died away.

But they knew the reason of that without asking. Marching troops are wont to halt every hour for a few minutes, and this silence only portended a halt.

Sandy and the Zouave, without hesitation, waded into the river, resolved to cross to the Russian side, favored by the fog.

In three steps they were waist deep, in another they would have had to swim, when Pichot grasped his companion's arm forcibly and pointed up the river.

Not ten feet from them, the figure of a mounted hussar, with the fur bushy and hanging jacket they had seen before that night, loomed up through the white mist, as the horse slowly and staggeringly labored toward the bank.

The animal seemed to be weak, although it was only up to the girths in water, for the two footmen had time to wade back, dart along the bank, and intercept him, before the horse scrambled on dry land.

Then the iron hand of Sandy McPherson was on the bridle, and Pichot covered the hussar with the Cossack's carbine, while the words came out simultaneously:

"Rendez-vous, coquin!"

"Surrender, ye soonril, or I'se blaw the scone aff yer heid!"

The strange officer started back in the saddle, and uttered a low shriek of dismay, in a voice almost like that of a girl; then, ere either could divine his intention, he was out of the saddle and into the river, where the waters closed over him.

All that remained to the comrades was a riderless charger, whose staggering frame announced that the piper's first shot had taken effect in a severe wound.

Sandy uttered a Gaelic curse, threw his pistol to Pichot, and leaped into the river after the disappearing hussar, just as the other rose to the surface.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE PRISONER.

THE Highland piper, from his lengthy, brawny frame, was a swift and powerful swimmer. Moreover, his bare legs gave him an advantage over a swimmer incumbered with a hussar's equipment.

In twenty minutes he was alongside of the other, had seized him by the pelisse, and "had his grup on him," as he phrased it.

That once accomplished, the other struggled no more. Indeed it turned out that he was a mere child in the grasp of the stout piper. He submitted in perfect silence, when Sandy drew his dirk and hissed out:

"Not a word, or I'se slit yer wame, mon."

Then the Highlander dropped his feet to the ground and dragged his passive and silent prisoner to the bank.

There he looked up, for the first time, and found that the current had carried them both under the dark arch of the bridge, on which he heard voices.

Sandy McPherson halted by the abutment and listened. The two vedettes on the bridge were talking to each other, and he fancied they might have heard the splashing in the stream.

He held the point of the dirk to the throat of the prisoner, with a significant pressure of his other hand on the latter's shoulder, and continued to listen.

A stir in the grass beside him, and a low groan, showed him the whereabouts of his late Cossack prisoner, and the piper made but one step forward, dragging the supposed Hussar officer with him. Then he set his huge foot on the

Cossack's throat, and gave it a very significant squeeze.

The hint sufficed. The Cossack lay still.

At that moment the rumbling of guns commenced once more, and the rapid click of hoofs announced that more cavalry was trotting down to the bridge.

Sandy dragged his second prisoner away, covered by the noise, and hurried up the bank to where he had left Pichot.

He found the latter standing by a fallen steed.

"Coom, mon, we maun be ganging," he said, in a low voice. "The enemy are advancing, and we'll ha'e to rin hame."

The Zouave made no objection, and taking their silent prisoner between them the two comrades started up the hill at a rapid pace! They were comparatively careless about noise now, for the rumble of artillery and the murmur of troops was so great and near by that it drowned their rustling in the bushes.

In ten minutes' hard climbing they had reached the top of the bank, and stopped to rest. Below them they could distinctly hear the orders and counter-orders, that told of some movement going on in the valley of the Tchernaya.

Horses were galloping to and fro on the further bank, guns rumbling along, and the stamping of animals here and there, with the sudden cessation of rumble in places, and the clink of iron chains, told the veterans the whole story.

Presently the rumbling ceased, and Sandy whispered:

"They ha'e gane into battery, Peesho. What d'ye mak' o' that?"

Pichot threw himself on his face at the edge of the cliff, and listened. The dull murmur of voices was almost hushed, but he could hear a muffled trampling of feet on the hollow stone bridge. He jumped up and spoke, in a grave tone:

"Mon ami, infantry is coming over the bridge. We must hurry back. There is going to be a surprise."

"So I'm thinkin'," said the piper. It's unco lucky that the mirk's sae theek, or we might have a sair sight o' trouble to escape on this plain. Coom, Peesho."

The comrades again stole away to return to camp; and as they left the vicinity of the valley, so did the murmur die away. When they had gone a quarter of a mile it was inaudible, and a stillness, as of death, had settled over the Inkerman Plateau.

The three continued their way toward what they thought was the direction of the English lines; but the fog was so dense, and the night so dark, in spite of a faint moon in her last quarter, that it was the merest guess-work.

They walked on for nearly an hour, their prisoner being still silent, till Sandy of a sudden put out his foot and stumbled forward, disappearing headlong down a declivity.

The piper uttered an involuntary shout, and came down on hands and knees, grasping at bushes and tufts of grass in vain.

He was on the side of a steep declivity, and could not stop his course, rolling over and over down a rugged slope, till he came souse into a deep pool of water at the bottom, out of which he swam at last, a sadder and a wetter man, to find himself in an unknown country, where towering hills were all round him, except on one side, where a grassy plain stretched toward Balaklava.

Sandy McPherson had fallen over the edge of the Inkerman cliffs, where they ran into the Sapounye Ridge, and had been lucky enough to save his neck and tumble into the lines of the French corps of observation under Bosquet.

Not that Sandy had any such idea at first; for he was too much bewildered with his sudden fall to realize anything; but, a moment later, he was hailed by a sharp voice in French, while the click of a cocked musket enforced the words:

"Halt! Qui va la?"

"Deed, then, mounseer, and it's anely a puir Hieland laddie, and I dinna ken if his banes are a' haill or no," said the piper, ruefully. "And wha may you be, mounseer?"

He could see no one, but the French voice cried, furiously:

"Sacr-r-re tete de cochon! Silence! Qui va la?"

Sandy remembered then that French sentries are apt to shoot very quick, and he mustered up all the French he knew.

"Ami! Ami! Ecossais!"

"Avance, Ecossais, et donnez la consigne," said the stern voice, and Sandy groped his way through the fog, and beheld the turban and capote of a Zouave, as the latter covered him threateningly with his piece.

Sandy was in a predicament. He understood that the sentry wanted the countersign, and he had none. Moreover, in the words "friend and Scotchman," he had exhausted his stock of French words. So he tried English again.

"I dinna speak French, mounseer, and I ha'e no countersign; but, gin ye ca' the corporal of the guard, I'll tell any officer ye ha'e that can speak English."

The Zouave leveled his musket.

"Vous êtes espion," (you are a spy) he said. "Arrêtez vous là, et ne bougez pas, ou je tire," (stop there and don't stir, or I'll fire.)

Sandy obeyed the gesture rather than the words, and took his seat on the ground. His own sentry experience convinced him that the Zouave was going to keep him there till the relief came round, and that if he made a motion the other would shoot him. How long he would have to stay he could not tell, perhaps two hours. And in the meantime, he could not get news to his comrades, and he knew that a Russian column was advancing to take them by surprise.

What then did the Highlander in such a distressing predicament?

"It's nae use cryin' ower spilt milk," he said, calmly. "Peesho maun do the warnin' himsel'. 'Twill be a braw foight, I'm thinkin'." And he drew his pipe from his pocket and prepared to smoke. At that moment the first streaks of dawn began to light up the east, and a grayish light shone through the fog.

At the very instant the light strengthened, a rattling fire of musketry opened overhead on the Inkerman Plateau, and the drums beat to arms.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE TELEGRAM.

THE Minister of Police, alone in the church of Beloi Gorod, suddenly heard a clicking noise in a dark corner of the church. Gorloff started, and a violent sweat burst out on his body, as he shrunk behind the pillar.

"Click! click! crrrrrrrr! click! click!" went something in that dark corner, for several seconds. Then a little bell rung, and the clicking was renewed.

Gorloff listened, completely dumfounded, till the noise ceased.

Then he heard voices under his feet, and a great slab of marble rose in the floor within six feet of him.

The police minister put his hand in his vest, and clutched a small pistol that lay concealed there. He began to think he might need it.

The slab rose on edge, and remained stationary. Then a young man in the dress of a civilized European, came out from behind it, bearing a lantern; and spoke to some one below, in English.

"Only a message, Tom. The prince will not be here till near morning. I'll attend to it. Keep up the fires, for it's a cold night."

He passed by Gorloff without observing him, and the minister of police breathed freer.

The young man went to the corner of the church whence the noise had proceeded, and Gorloff leaned eagerly forward to look. The light of the lantern fell on a small side altar, on which stood a picture of St. Nicholas. The minister saw the young man raise the altar-cloth, and the mystery was explained.

Under the cloth he distinguished by the lantern the well-known brass wheels and clock-work of a telegraph-register with its endless slip of paper. The news from the Crimea was easily accounted for. Prince Gallitzin had established a telegraph to Sebastopol!

But how had he done so? Gorloff knew that the only line in Russia was from St. Petersburg to Moscow, and surely the line of poles could not be hidden anywhere else. How did the line operate, and where did the wires run? He gnashed his teeth as he thought of the simple device by which the prince had outwitted him.

But, for all that, he watched the young man keenly.

From the outline of face and figure, and from the cut of his clothes, he judged him to be a foreigner, but not an Englishman. The accents of his voice were those of an American, sharp and precise, devoid of the peculiar English slur that marks the best educated Briton.

The young man took up the slip and read aloud:

"Nadia is here, and will soon be on her way to you. Beware of Gorloff. I killed one of his spies yesterday, looking over my desk. He has found out that I send you the news. I bury the station to-day to keep it from being found. God bless Russia and the Starry Cross. IVAN."

Gorloff heard every word, and secretly exulted.

"By thunder!" exclaimed the young American, aloud, "that will be bad news for the prince, and for me, too. The old fellow will hate to give up his news. Bury the station? I suppose he's got it down in some hole or other. Well, well, this will be bad news when the prince comes."

As he spoke he put down the lantern, and sat down to the little instrument. The police minister heard the clicking of a new message being rapidly sent, and wondered what it was all about.

Then the young man called out:

"Tom, come here."

"Ay, ay," grumbled a voice below stairs; "I'm coming. Thought there was something the matter. Has the machine busted?"

A second young man, in a somewhat humbler dress, as of an attendant on the first, emerged

from the hole in the floor, and went toward the telegraph operator.

Gorloff waited till he was at a safe distance, when he stole forward to the uplifted slab and peeped down into the hole. He saw there a large, handsome, well-lighted room, with carpets, furniture, and a tremendous blazing fire, which partly accounted for the warmth of the church.

He had no time to make many observations, for the voice of the telegraph operator and Tom were too important in their utterances not to be listened to.

"The police spies are coming here, I guess, Tommy, and we shall have to look for a new trade," said the operator. "They've had to fill in the station at the other end of the line."

"That ain't here," responded his companion, bluntly. "I'd like to see the police find out this machine. Why, the folks in the village wouldn't no more dare come in here than nothing. Does she signal yet, Mr. Ford?"

The operator made no reply for a moment. He was listening for an answer to his message.

Presently it came, and then it was that Gorloff felt an intense longing to understand and interpret those mysterious clicks. He listened eagerly to the conversation to gain a clue.

"Well, what does he say?" asked Tom, when the noise ceased.

"He says that Nadia will be here in ten days," said the operator. "Who she is I don't know, but I suppose the prince will. We'll have to take a young lady in to hide, I guess."

"Well, it's too bad we'll have to stop sending messages," said Tom. "I wonder if he's going to bury his side, really?"

The young man dropped the altar cloth over the instrument and rose.

"We can't tell till the prince comes," he said. "I don't know how you feel, Tom, but I'm amazing sleepy. I shall turn in till he comes."

"All right, Mr. Ford," said Tom, stolidly. "I ain't any ways anxious to keep up in this dismal old hole, myself."

So saying the two Americans, for such Gorloff felt sure they were, returned to the place whence they had emerged, and slowly descended before his eyes, entirely unconscious of his presence. As soon as they had gone, the minister of police darted forward to the side altar, and snatched away the long marked slip of paper which depended from between the toothed wheels of the instrument. He could not read it himself, but he knew that there were plenty of people in his employ that could. He tore it hurriedly away and crammed it into his breast; passed down the center aisle of the church, and was gone into the open air.

The village was still as ever. The moon, some distance past the full, was just rising over the pine trees in the east. The distant howl of the prowling wolf was melancholy, and almost musical in its intonation.

Gorloff passed along down the street, over the snow crust, and came to the house where he was lodging for the night. He knew that behind the stable was a door in the palisades, opening outward, by which he could escape. Now that he had found what he wanted, he was no longer desirous of prolonging his stay in the village.

He went to the stable and brought out his horse. In anticipation of just such an emergency, he had put a saddle and bridle in the sledge.

With this he hastily equipped his animal, led it out through the side door in the palisades, mounted, and raced away for dear life toward Petersburg, leaving the door wide open behind him. He cared nothing for the wolves in the forest, nor of letting them in on the sleeping inhabitants. He was armed against the one danger, and the people of Beloi Gorod could take care of themselves.

With the precious dispatches hugged close in his breast, the minister of police galloped toward Petersburg, repeating to himself:

"Now I have him at last, and Cyprianoff, and her, the proud beauty who has caused so many hearts to ache. Nadia Gallitzin, in ten days more you shall be in my power."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE HEART OF A ZOUAVE.

WHEN the piper disappeared down the side of the cliff, the Zouave corporal was very near following him. Only a desperate effort enabled him to scramble back from the edge, and in so doing he let go the hold he had hitherto kept on the silent prisoner.

With a low cry the latter turned and fled into the fog; and before the Zouave was on his feet, the fugitive was almost out of sight. But Pichot was too old a soldier to be caught in that way; and moreover, his Zouave education had practiced him in running. Away he went, at full speed, on the track of the fugitive, and soon found that he could keep his own, though the hussar certainly ran like a deer. The fog and the unknown ground were both great hindrances, but corporal Pichot was determined not to be beaten, and he bounded forward with rapid strides, till he could hear the panting breath of his chase.

Then just as he reached forth his hand the hussar dropped his pelisse and fur cap, and doubled off at right angles into the fog, faster than ever.

Pichot uttered a furious "sac-r-r-r-r-re," and followed again, coming up hand over hand; but as he neared his chase he kept a more cautious look-out for the tactics of evasion.

Again, however, the fugitive doubled on him, with the same success, and ran a few steps on a new course. But Pichot was not thrown out over six feet this time, and saw that the other was staggering as he ran.

The brown, muscular hand of the Zouave closed with a grip of iron on a cluster of curls that floated out behind the head of the fugitive, and then at last the chase was over.

Pichot seized the other savagely, only to let go the next moment. With the unmistakable shriek of a woman, the supposed hussar dropped on the ground, and lay still!

The corporal's feelings underwent a change in that instant, such as he had never before experienced.

"Thousand booms and grape-shot!" he ejaculated, in his native tongue; "we have been hectoring a woman all this time. Pichot, Pichot, thou art disgraced! A French soldier, and a gallant man, and yet never knew that this was a woman! Mon Dieu! Who can she be? Oh, if we had a light."

It was indeed very dark, and the fog added to his difficulties. But the Zouave knelt down and raised his prisoner's head on his knees as tenderly as could be. Since the wonderful discovery he had made, he was full of curiosity to know who this woman could be. He peered through the darkness at her features, but in vain, till a thought struck him. Fumbling in his jacket pocket, among loose tobacco, ends of cigars, and pipes, he extricated a match and struck a light. As the blaze sprung up for a brief moment, he held it near the face of his captive, and uttered a low cry of wonder and pity.

That face was one too well imprinted on his memory to be forgotten. It was the face of the same beautiful lady that he and his comrades had rescued from the seraglio at Constantinople!

"Alas, alas!" groaned the corporal; "I loved her and she is a Russian spy. The Scot was right. What shall I do?"

The form on his arm hung there with a limp weight that told that its owner was certainly senseless. It was a strange thought to think what could have brought that beautiful creature there, hunted like a wild beast by Russian and English alike.

"No wonder the poor lady fainted," muttered Pichot. "She has gone through enough to kill a man, running and swimming, shot at by Cossacks, and half-strangled by McPherson. At least she shall not complain that Pichot is her enemy any longer. Poor, beautiful demoiselle, thus I consecrate myself to thy service, come what may. I am thy slave."

And the Zouave reverently, kissed the cold forehead of the insensible girl as he spoke.

The action seemed to revive her in some measure, for she stirred and uttered a heavy sigh.

"Do not fear, dear young lady," whispered the corporal. "I am with you and no one shall harm you."

"Where am I? Who are you?"

"I am Corporal Pichot of the Third Zouaves," said the soldier; "one of the four that had the honor to assist mademoiselle in getting out of the way of the Turks at Constantinople. Permit me to repeat that I am still at mademoiselle's service."

"But where are we?" she asked. "I do not remember clearly. Some one shot my horse and seized me, and then I ran away. Where are we?"

"We are on the Inkerman Plateau, between the lines of the two armies, mademoiselle," replied Pichot, gravely. "What is more, I fear it is my duty to consider you a prisoner as a spy—but do not fear. I have weighed and accept the consequences. I shall be considered a deserter. Well, I take the disgrace. I will become a Russian, to be near you and serve you."

The Zouave's voice faltered as he spoke. No one who has not seen the intense affection and pride of a French soldier in his regiment can understand the sacrifice Pichot was making. The girl herself rose slowly up, and confronted him, just as a grayish light began to penetrate the thick fog.

"Soldier," she said, "I do not deserve it. All who love me, die, or suffer death in life. You do not know what is coming. In a few minutes more your friends will be surprised by overwhelming forces and destroyed. And I, alas, in my blind devotion, am the accursed cause of the disaster. Oh, sir, kill me while you can, and hasten to warn your comrades. They will be driven into the sea, but Russia is safe. Then let me die, and save them from useless slaughter, for they must surrender to the czar."

Pichot laid his hand on her soft shoulder. The idea flashed across him what a blind fool he had been not to feel that this was a girl long before.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "next to us lie the English Guards, the men who boast that nothing can beat them back from their post. If it were French I might hesitate, but let the English take care of themselves. You are a Russian princess. I follow you."

"You mistake," she said, in a low tone, "I am—only a spy. Kill me, and save your own life."

"It is too late," said the Zouave, calmly. "See yonder."

The light was increasing. They could see each other through the fog with sufficient distinctness, and objects within a few yards were faintly discernible.

The disguised girl looked in the direction pointed out by the Zouave. A column of gray-coated Russian soldiers, with spiked helmets, line after line, close together, were stealing through the fog as silently as ghosts, with their left flank turned toward the watchers. All carried their arms at the slope, and kept their eyes sternly to the front, as if totally unmindful of what took place on either side.

"You see, mademoiselle," said the Zouave; "it is too late. The *rosbif Anglais* must fight it out. I could do nothing if I would. Now, where are you going?"

"Where you cannot follow," she said, sadly. "I have ruined you as a soldier, and I must make you reparation. Flee to your friends over the cliff. Your comrades of the Zouaves are there. Tell them what you have found out, and save them from utter ruin."

"It is too late," said the Zouave, again. "Look yonder."

A line of flashes lighted up the fog ahead, and the rattle of musketry was followed by a yell of ferocious exultation and hate. Then they saw the endless column of ghostly gray figures break into violent motion. Shouts and cries went up in a strange medley of sound, ghostly officers waved their swords, the silent, cautious step changed to the rapid tramp of the "double-quick," and rank after rank of fierce Muscovite soldiers swept through the fog to the front, where now a line of red flashes gleamed incessantly, and the rolling crackle of fire-firing never ceased.

"*Sac-r-r-re nom!*" hissed the Zouave, as several bullets whistled past them; "the English are awake, after all, it seems. We must get out of this, mademoiselle, for there will be hot work in a few minutes."

"No, no, I cannot go. I have a duty to perform," cried the girl, wringing her hands, as if in distress. "Leave me and escape, for God's sake, dear friend."

For all answer, the Zouave seized her in his powerful arms and hurried her away to the rear, out of sight of those ghostly ranks of savage warriors. The tramp of battalions was heard all around them, as the dense Russian columns swarmed to the attack, but the Zouave was lost in that providential fog for several minutes.

Then, all of a sudden, came the clatter and jingle of horse, and the pair ran right into the midst of a Russian general and his staff, coming galloping to the front.

In a twinkling they were surrounded.

CHAPTER XXXIII

MOSCOW.

The great bells of Moscow were all booming together in rejoicing over the discomfiture of the foreign invaders. The third bombardment of Sebastopol had terminated with equal failure to all the former attempts. Todleben had pushed his rifle-pits closer than ever to the English and French lines; the winter had brought fearful sufferings to the Allies; the siege languished; Russia rejoiced, and the summer was come again.

All Moscow was out, waiting for fresh news, and it was announced that the czar was coming to visit his faithful people.

On a glorious evening in June, a handsome carriage with the arms of the princely house of Gallitzin on the panels, passed through the Spass Vorota or Holy Gate, on its way to the citadel of Moscow. On the box sat a magnificently-dressed coachman, whose bushy beard and pug nose were unmistakably a peasant's. This was not usual among the Russian nobility, who generally employ the very handsomest Tartar to be hired for coachman.

This man was a regular dull-looking *mujik* or peasant.

As if to make up for his ugliness, however, the *chasseur* behind the carriage was a handsome, well-built fellow, in a uniform blazing with gold lace. He seemed to be a Frenchman, from the language which he used in answer to some question from the occupant of the carriage. But that was not surprising, since foreigners are commoner than natives in rich Russian households.

The occupant of the carriage already mentioned was a young lady of extreme and almost bewildering beauty, in the brunette style. She was richly dressed, like any fashionable lady, but her face was very pale as she passed through the Spass Vorota.

Over the gate was the miraculous picture of

St. Nicholas, which in 1812—so runs the legend—defied all the power of the great Napoleon to move it from its place, and resisted volleys of bullets like a rock.

As the young lady's carriage passed through the gate, the cuirassier on duty barred the way with his sword, and called out:

"Halt, till the captain examines your passports!"

Then a polite officer came forward to the carriage-door, evidently impressed by the looks of the equipage, for he seemed to be quite sorry to give any trouble.

"Mademoiselle will pardon me in the execution of my duty," he said; "but I am compelled to trouble her for her passport. It is a mere form, but what would you? The czar has said it."

"How long is it since passports are demanded of the families of the grand dukes and princes?" asked the young lady coldly. "I have but just come in from my father's estates, and they did not tell me that a passport was necessary to come to Moscow."

"It is a late ukase," said the officer, politely but firmly, "with which mademoiselle will do well to comply. Of course she has a passport."

"Yes," said the lady quietly; "but I do not think that I ought to be compelled to show it to you. I am the Princess Nadia Gallitzin, to be stopped by no one lower than a prince."

The official started back when he heard the name, and looked the lady full in the face. His eyes met the gaze of her great, dark, luminous orbs with a stare of wonder. Then he spoke in a half-frightened voice:

"Princess Nadia Gallitzin! Why, she is dead, gracious lady. She died four years ago."

"She did not die, sir," said the lady firmly. "She lives, and has come back to seek the czar, and confound her enemies. Order your soldier back. A princess is passing."

But the officer did not budge. He seemed to be struggling with his feelings to execute a painful duty.

"What do you wait for, sir?" asked the princess, in icy tones.

"Madam," said he, in a low tone, "I regret to say that I have orders to arrest you, and confine you in the Kremlin till the czar's coming."

The lady had been pale before. Now a flush dyed her cheek, and her eye glittered with angry scorn as she asked:

"At whose order?"

"At the orders of the minister of police, gracious princess."

The lady smiled scornfully.

"And suppose that I say I will not obey the order?"

"Then I shall be compelled to use force, madam," he said, in a tone of perfect respect, but expressive of equal resolution.

What the lady might have answered is uncertain, for at that moment the jingle of chains and scabbards approached, and the cuirassier shouted:

"Guard, turn out! His Imperial Highness, Grand Duke Alexander!"

"Wait here and draw to one side," said the officer, in a quick, sharp tone, to the coachman on the box. "Out of the way for the Grand Duke."

He darted away, and the carriage drew to one side of the gate, leaving the passage free.

The young princess leaned out of the window, on the side away from the guard-house, and saw the tall, heavy frame of the heir to the empire, his breast glittering with orders, as he galloped down the street on a black charger.

He wore the uniform of an officer of Cossacks, and as she looked at him she uttered a low exclamation of surprise and intense thankfulness.

The next instant the czarevitch, followed by a strong escort of Cossacks, threw his horse on its haunches in front of the paraded guard, and lifted his cap in answer to their salute.

Then he turned his gaze to the carriage; and, as he met the lustrous eyes of the beautiful occupant, he too seemed to experience a great amazement. He moved his horse up to the carriage.

The young princess was the first to speak.

"When Captain Blank risked his honor to save mine," she said, "I told him that Russia should not repent it. God be thanked that I have met you, Alexander Nicolaivitch, for you can save me from the clutches of Gorloff, in the name of the Starry Cross."

She spoke so low that no one else heard her. Alexander answered promptly.

"Beautiful stranger, whoever you are, I swear by the head of Peter no harm shall come to you that I can avert."

Then he turned to the guards, and said haughtily:

"Let this lady pass. If any one asks why, she is under my protection. Let me see who will harm her."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE BOLD GAME.

THE minister of police was walking up and down in his secret cabinet like a caged wild

beast, and evidently in the worst of humors. A deep scowl was on his brow, and an expression of the deepest anxiety disturbed him.

The fact was that Gorloff was at his wits' end. His great army of spies, usually so efficient, seemed to be powerless to effect any thing against his prime enemy, Gallitzin.

The previous winter had settled that question. The discovery he had made in the church at Beloi Gorod had proved of no value, for when his officers had reached the place the next day, all traces of the telegraph station had disappeared. The most astute of his agents had been unable to discover any thing in the way of instrument or operators, and the cellar of the old church was as cold and dark as ever.

Gorloff had been cautious enough to avoid communicating his suspicions to the emperor till he was possessed of proofs, and therefore he had lost no credit with Nicholas; but, all the same, he felt a writhing sense of impotence in the hands of Gallitzin, who seemed to wield a power equal or superior to his own.

Now he was pacing up and down, thinking over new plots, when a knock came to the door.

"Come in," cried the minister, and his private secretary entered.

"A courier from Moscow, your excellency."

"Send him in," said the chief, and the secretary vanished.

Presently a man came in, a square-built Tartar, girt with a sash of extraordinary breadth and length, from hips to armpits, to guard against rupture from constant violent riding.

The Tartar handed him a yellow envelope, marked "Official," and Gorloff glanced over the contents, with some listlessness at first.

Very soon, however, his face changed. The letter was a report that the Princess Nadia Gallitzin was in Moscow, and that she was under the avowed protection of the Grand Duke Alexander. It concluded by assuring the minister that the spies had her every moment under complete surveillance.

As soon as the minister had read the note, his face cleared.

"Now I have them at last," he muttered.

"If the czar does not act on this, I am mistaken."

He turned to the Tartar.

"Go and rest. You may be wanted to-night. I am going to the palace."

In another moment he was hastily putting on his side-arms, and preparing for his visit to the czar. A carriage was ready day and night, and within ten minutes he was at the door of the emperor's cabinet, while the cuirassier announced him.

He found the czar sitting alone by a table, looking gloomy and preoccupied.

"Well, Gorloff, what news?" he asked, listlessly.

"Your majesty, I have just received news from Moscow that the Princess Nadia Gallitzin has entered the city openly, and has been as openly received and protected by his imperial highness, the czarevitch."

The emperor turned his blood-shot eyes on the minister with a strange look. It was half-angry, half-desperate.

"Gorloff," he said, not unkindly, "you have been a faithful servant, and I have been a hard master. I have tried to serve my people for thirty years now, and see what thanks I get. With a million of men in my armies, on paper, I can not drive forth sixty thousand French and English from Sebastopol. My people look askance at me in the streets, and cheer me no more; and now my own son shelters my enemies. It's very hard, Gorloff, but I will not yield. Take full authority to Moscow and arrest that woman. If necessary arrest him too."

Gorloff smiled triumphantly.

"Your majesty, I will engage to bring her back in ten days."

"Not here, not here," said the czar, hastily.

"Do you want to provoke a serfs' revolt? To Siberia at once with her. They tell no tales there."

Gorloff hesitated, and the czar motioned to him to speak.

"Sire," he said, "your majesty forgets one thing. If the Grand Duke Alexander knows of this, it is equally certain that by this time Prince Gallitzin is also informed, and through him, the whole body of boyars and princes."

The czar made no answer. He sat buried in gloomy thought.

The minister paused to allow his words to take full effect, and then added:

"There is only one way to avert danger in this matter, sire. The prince and all his accomplices must be arrested and sent to Siberia on suspicion. The knot is complicated, sire. The only way to loose it is to cut it."

The czar looked up, and then Gorloff noticed, for the first time, an expression of weariness and disgust on those usually grim and resolute features. The czar looked decidedly ill.

"What is the use, Gorloff?" he said, listlessly.

"The Allies are pressing closer to Sebastopol every day, and the people will not stir to fight. Let it all go. I am tired of it."

Gorloff looked with amazement at his usually iron master.

"Sire," he said, gravely, "if your majesty

wishes the princess to be restored to society, he must remember that the safety of the throne will be imperiled. The princess, sire, was arrested by me, at your order, two years ago, when out on a lonely ride. She was arrested on the information of her stepmother, the Princess Sergia Gallitzin, for trying to excite a revolt among the serfs and crown peasants. To avoid scandal, her horse was drowned in the Neva, and she was reported dead, while sent to Siberia. Your majesty will remember that, now the truth is known to Gallitzin, there will be heavy trouble. I am told that he has been heard to say that your majesty might yet follow the fate of Czar Paul, if he chose to give the word."

"He said that, did he?" queried the czar, in a tone of more animation than he had yet shown. "Now, by the head of Peter, we'll see who falls first. Have you the orders of arrest?"

The minister produced several papers from his breast.

"I took the precaution to bring them with me, sire. Your own august signature is all they need."

The czar drew them toward him, and hastily scrawled his signature on about a dozen orders.

"When do you commence operations?" said he.

"As soon I as leave this chamber," said the count. "To-night I start for Moscow, and Gallitzin for Tobolsk."

The czar gave a sigh of relief.

"I shall be glad of it. I hate that man more than any one else in all Russia."

"Your majesty has suffered from him for the last time. To-night he will be on his way to the mines."

Then the wily minister backed from the presence, bearing the precious orders, and drove straight back to his palace, where he summoned at least a score of superior officers of police, and laid his plans for the capture.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE DREAD MESSENGER.

COUNT IVAN CYPRIANOFF, in his uniform of full general, and followed by a brilliant staff, rode in at the Spass Vorota of Moscow, at the head of a considerable force of Cossacks, escorting English and French prisoners, taken at Sebastopol. The huge bear-skin hat of the English guardsman, and the equally towering plumes of the Highlanders, were seen in the midst of crowds of kind and sympathizing peasants of Moscow, who came to offer the foreign barbarians presents of food and fruit. The white turbans of the Zouaves, and their gay uniforms, were to be seen here and there in the crowd of prisoners, but most of them were English soldiers.

"Tom Higgs, ye auld dumb tyke," said a tall, brawny Scot, with his left arm in a sling, while his right affectionately embraced the ragged bag of a now useless pibroch; "can ye no' rouse up and say thank ye, like a gentleman, when thae pretty lassies are sae kind? Odds, mon, but it amais me greet to think that we shuld see Moscow in sic a fashion as this. I thocht thae Rooshan bodies were a' salvages; and here's a lassie, wi' a face like my ain Highland Jeanie, that jist throost a bannock o' gude ait bread into ma hand, and lukes sae pitifu' at me. Mon, mon, war's a fearsome thing. I wadna wush this to last ony langer."

Sandy McPherson was the piper to whom the girl had given the loaf of oat-bread, which had so touched his heart. The stout piper had been taken prisoner, late in the day, at Inkerman, after being released by the officer of the Zouave outposts. He had rushed back to his regiment, just in time to put on his best uniform, and get to his place in the line.

Sandy had taken part in the final charge on the retreating Russian columns, and in that charge had been wounded and taken prisoner. He had met his old friend, Higgs, in the rear when he was taken there, for the guardsman had been captured in the very first assault on the redoubt in the morning.

Now, after a long detention in the prison at Odessa, orders had come for all the English and French prisoners to be sent to Moscow, for the czar was coming to see them.

General Cyprianoff had received peremptory orders to report to head-quarters at Moscow, and accompany prisoners. The young general had distinguished himself at Inkerman; and yet, when he received the order, he knew that all was not right.

The prisoners were marched up to the Kremlin, where a general of inferior rank took charge of them, while Cyprianoff rode up to the palace to report. He was ushered into the cabinet of the Governor of Moscow, and, as he entered, was confronted by no less a personage than the heir apparent to the empire.

Cyprianoff bowed low before the czarevitch. "I humbly crave pardon of your imperial highness, but I was ordered to report to the Governor of Moscow."

"Very good," said the grand duke, smiling. "I am the Governor of Moscow for the present. His majesty has ordered me here. Have you turned over your prisoners?"

"I have, your highness."

"Very good. You will proceed to St. Petersburg at once, and report yourself to the minister of police, *under arrest*."

The czarevitch spoke in an ordinary conversational tone, and there was nothing to denote that he took any interest in the matter. Cyprianoff flushed scarlet at the words, and stammered out:

"Your highness! Is it possible? What have I done?"

"Oh, my dear count," said the grand duke, laughing; "you must not expect me to disclose Count Gorloff's secrets. I expect every day a summons to report myself in the same manner. By the by, your uncle, Prince Dolgoroucki, and your old friend, Gallitzin, are both under arrest, awaiting your arrival. I believe that there is some talk about aiding a convict named Anna Bronk to escape. But really, I cannot busy my memory with it all. I hardly think it will be much trouble, count."

Cyprianoff looked steadily at the grand duke, as if he desired to ask a question. But Alexander turned away to the table, which was covered with papers, and indicated by his manner that he wished to be left alone.

With a heavy sigh, the young general moved off, and was almost at the door, when the czarevitch turned round.

"By the by, general, when I come I shall bring two very important witnesses with me. One is Captain Livingstone of the Vladimir, who is here on leave, since his vessel has been laid up. The other is a lady. Good-morning."

Cyprianoff blushed like a girl, and a gleam of joy passed over his face.

"I humbly thank your highness," said he, and left the room.

As soon as he had gone, the czarevitch threw himself back in his arm-chair, and called in a low voice:

"Nadia, come hither."

Instantly, from a secret door—the Kremlin is a queer old place, full of dark passages and secret doors—the same beautiful girl, who has figured in these pages under so many names, came out and knelt before the czarevitch with a mute gesture of entreaty, as if longing to ask some question or beg a favor.

The grand duke shook his head, but his face was very kind.

"You can not see him yet, Nadia. Remember that I risk much when I keep you here, and that, once outside, I could not protect you. Fear not, child, all will be well yet. The Starry Cross shelters you and me, and my father must yield. Now prepare yourself to travel to-night, with me, for I have news that a courier is coming from the czar, who may be here at any moment."

"And shall I not be permitted to see Ivan before he goes?" asked the girl, piteously. "Oh, your highness, consider only all the trials which we have undergone. To find him and my dear adopted father once more I braved the storms of winter, the perils of the steppe, the bullets of English and countrymen alike. I have been where woman never was before, exiled without a crime, forced to become a spy to reach home, and now compelled to hide away from him I love for fear of discovery. Oh, your highness, let me call him back, to hear him say with his own lips, 'Nadia, I am true still.'"

The grand duke knit his brows coldly. With all his mildness, there was a strong spice of his father's dictatorial ways about him. He waved the princess away, saying:

"I have spoken. Foolish child, do you fancy that you are the only one that has run dangers? Remember that we Romanoffs kill our children, and that the czar would not hesitate to kill me if I were in his way. Go to your chamber and prepare. I tell you that all will yet come right."

The girl was about to retire, when a knock came at the door.

"Come in," said the grand duke, eagerly.

"Is it the courier from my father?"

"It is, so please your highness," said the servant at the door.

"In with him. Never mind ceremony."

In another moment the Tartar courier lumbered into the room, and the czarevitch snatched at the package.

He had no sooner opened it, than he exclaimed in a low tone, half to himself, half to Nadia:

"Good heavens! The czar is dangerously ill."

The package was indeed a communication from the minister of state, informing his royal highness, with profound respect, that the czar was lying at the point of death at the Winter Palace, and desired to see his son and heir at once.

The Princess Nadia hesitated. She was about to retire, when Alexander made her a silent signal to remain. Then he motioned servant and courier alike to leave the room and turned to the young lady.

"Child," said the czarevitch in a tone of tender sadness, "The end has come at last, but not as we expected. Weak, blind mortals that we are, we are all in the hands of the Almighty. Russia will be regenerated, and you will be free,

but I shall lose my father. Nadia Gallitzin, thank God that you were not born a Romanoff, where family affection is almost a prohibited thing between czar and czarevitch. God grant it may not be so with my son and me. Prepare to depart, my child. You can go openly now. Justice shall be done."

He motioned her away, and both left the room in different directions to prepare for the coming journey.

Meanwhile, in the courts of the Kremlin a great bustle was observable. The news of the sudden illness of the czar had spread like wildfire, and the usually subdued demeanor of the Russian soldiers was changed to one of great excitement.

The prisoners, bivouacked in front of the gate, noticed the disturbance, and soon heard the news.

"Eh, mon, but that's gran' news," said Sandy the piper to Higgs, "for they tell me the auld czar was an unco wicked body, and that the young one's a decent lad, that wadna hurt a flea. Noo, mon, the war will be over, and we'll a' gang hame— Eh, bless and save us—whae's this?"

The excitement was called forth by a figure in a glittering chasseur uniform, a handsome man with a long black beard, who came in among the prisoners at the moment Sandy spoke. He was accompanied by a big Cossack sergeant, to whom he was speaking in broken Russian, and cast his eyes right and left among the prisoners, as if searching for some one.

"Eh, sirs, and wha wad it be but Peesho!" exclaimed Sandy, springing to his feet. "Peesho, that we a' thocht was killit at Inkerman wi' that fause spy that gied us sae muckle wark. Peesho, ye donnard auld de'il, what gars ye luke aroon' in that fashion? Dinna ye ken yer auld comrades?"

The ex-Zouave looked for one moment doubtfully at the piper, and then rushed at him and hugged him crying:

"Mon Ecossais, mon brave Ecossais, je t'ai trouve! I have found thee at last! And thou, too, my brave Higgs. It is well thee. Ah, I am happy now. Potapoff, it is my comrades, and we have found them."

The Cossack sergeant stroked his bushy beard and grinned a truly Russian grin of amiability.

"If you have found them," he said, "they must have the tokens of which the princess spoke. If so, let them come along."

"McPherson, Higgs, the rings that the beautiful princess gave you, where are they?" queried the Zouave. "Ah, my friends, I have much to tell you of what has happened since we parted on that field of Inkerman. But the rings. Where are they?"

The piper held up his finger, on which gleamed the brilliant jewel given to him, a year before, by the fugitive princess, Nadia.

"It is well," said Potapoff, gravely, to the chasseur; "let the soldiers you wish follow me."

"He led them to the door of the palace, and took them down an infinity of long, crooked passages, finally ushering them into a large hall, where a very tall, heavy-built officer, with a German face, was watching the frantic endeavors of a number of servants to hurry some trunks into a carriage standing at the open door.

The stately officer had a lady leaning on his arm, and as soon as Sandy saw her, he ejaculated:

"Eh, sirs, I tauld ye she was a princess. 'Tis the bonny leddy hersel', and we're a' richt."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE CZAR'S LAST ORDER.

In the state bedroom, furnished with all the stately splendor of a palace, but formal and cheerless as only such rooms can be, lay the massive form of the czar of all the Russias, haggard and worn, sickening to death under the pressure of mortified pride and distress of mind, as much as from the disease that had prostrated him.

Around him were the glittering uniforms of his ministers of all grades, men who stood stolidly and respectfully watching the flicker of the expiring flame of life, as cold to all seeming as the stones in the palace court. The eyes of the dying czar, once so terrible in their glances, were now sunk in their sockets, and had a mournful, appealing gaze, that seemed to look for something in the faces of those around, which it found not. Gorloff, the minister of police, was next to the court physician, who sat by the dying emperor and held his pulse. The princess Gallitzin, as Head Lady of the Robes, with the empress and a number of other ladies, was on the other side of the bed; a dead silence pervaded the apartment, through which the ticking of the clocks in every room of the palace seemed audible.

Suddenly the czar startled every one in the room with the question, in his deep, husky voice:

"How long have I to live, doctor? No equivocation."

"I think that there is no immediate danger to

your majesty," said the physician. "At the same time I will not disguise that your majesty is in a critical state."

"Gorloff, has the Grand Duke Alexander been sent for?" asked the czar, without further notice of the doctor.

"He has, your majesty," said the minister, in a constrained tone. "The courier returned this morning, reporting his imperial highness on the road."

"And he has let the courier outstrip him," said the czar, gloomily. "Well, well, I need not complain. As I have sown, so I must reap. Clear the room of all but the minister of police. I am not too ill to do business now, doctor?"

"I would by all means entreat your majesty not to excite yourself," said the doctor, eagerly. "I will not answer for the result. If your majesty tries to do business, it may bring on an access of pain that will shorten the time by many hours."

The czar looked scornfully at the doctor.

"Do you think Nicholas of Russia cares for a few hours, more or less, when Russia calls him? Clear the room quickly!"

He sat up in bed as he spoke; his voice had all its old power; and his eyes glowed with all their old fire, as he looked round the room in his peculiar manner.

As if by magic, the czar regained his old ascendancy in a moment, and the room was cleared, in an incredibly short space of time, of all but Gorloff.

Then Nicholas turned to his faithful servant, and said:

"Now, Gorloff, tell me, have you arrested these Brothers of the Starry Cross, and the Gallitzin girl? Where are they?"

"They are all safe in prison, sire, in the fortress of Cronstadt," in a hesitating, timid manner.

"All of them? The girl, too?" asked the czar, sternly.

"The girl is coming hither with his imperial highness, sire," said the minister, still more timidly. "I did not dare to take her away from the very train of—"

"Of the coming czar," said Nicholas, in a tone of intense scorn. "I see, Gorloff; like the rest, you turn from the setting to the rising sun. You are taking in sail. This sickness overthrows all your fine plans, does it not? Well, sir, you do not know Nicholas of Russia. The grave can not check my will. It shall be executed when I am in the vaults of Moscow. As soon as the czarevitch arrives, arrest his companion, wherever she may be, and confine her with the rest. I am going to find out all about this Gallitzin case now before I die. I think you have deceived me, Gorloff."

"Deceived your majesty—indeed—" stammered the count.

"Deceived me, and brought the justice of the czar into rebuke as the minister of private vengeance," said the czar, sternly. "See that you obey me now. Is Cyprianoff here yet?"

"He is in Cronstadt," said Gorloff, briefly.

"Good," said the czar. Then he started and listened. The rumble of a carriage was approaching.

"It is my son," cried Nicholas, eagerly. "Call them all in, Gorloff. They shall see that Nicholas is not dead yet. Remember your duty when the girl comes. Doubtless he thinks he can do what he likes, that the shoes are ready for him to step into. He shall see. Call them all in."

Closer and closer came the rumble of the carriage, as the czar sunk back on his pillows, deadly pale now, a cold sweat of mortal anguish on his brow; for the doctor's prediction had come true. The excitement of business had brought on a terrible access of pain.

The ministers and ladies filed silently and decorously into the room, and took their places with official composure around the bed. The empress was the only one that gave any token of feeling, and she was thinking chiefly of the loss of power she was about to undergo; for the empress was a proud woman.

Then there was a dead silence through the room, only broken by the hoarse, painful breathings of the dying czar, as he wrestled with his mortal malady.

And all the while the distant carriage was rumbling closer and closer. There was a clatter and clash, as of presented arms in the court below, and they heard the carriage stop.

"Thank God, he is come!" groaned the czar.

It was not long after that steps were heard in the anteroom, and the cuirassier at the door, as rigid as ever, announced:

"His imperial highness, the czarevitch."

The Grand Duke Alexander entered the room, his countenance grave and sad. He was hurriedly approaching the bed, when Nicholas sat bolt upright, with all his old sternness.

"What now, sir?" he cried. "Have you forgotten the respect due to the czar? Salute and report."

The grand duke stopped and wavered for a moment. He looked at his father with a mute gesture of entreaty, as if begging for one word of affection, but the old czar was firm as a rock. The czarevitch sighed deeply, then drew up and saluted as if on parade, saying:

"I beg leave to report that I have obeyed

your majesty, and have just arrived, according to orders."

"Whom have you brought with you, sir?" asked the czar, in a stern voice. "I hear that you have company."

Now, indeed, Alexander drew himself proudly up, and looked his father full in the face, answering:

"I have with me a lady, sire, who has been deeply injured by a villain now in this room, under pretense of your majesty's service. That lady I desire justice toward, for she has served Russia."

"Send her in," said the czar, shortly.

Without a word the grand duke wheeled on his heel, and left the room, and the czar sunk back on his pillow, under a worse access of pain than ever.

Twice he groaned aloud, a thing he had never done before, in all his torture, and even the coldly respectful courtiers looked sympathizingly at one another.

But when steps were again heard in the anteroom the effect was astounding on the czar. He gave a sort of angry roar, as if savagely determined to conquer nature itself and sprung up in bed, setting his teeth hard, and glaring at the door.

Then into the room walked the czarevitch, proud and erect; and leaning on his arm was the Princess Nadia Gallitzin, as lovely as ever, with a soft, appealing look on her pale face, as she met the gaze of the czar.

For the countenance of Nicholas, set and drawn with the struggle between horrible torture and the iron will of the Romanoffs, wore an expression of ferocity and anguish perfectly appalling.

Gorloff turned his gaze from the emperor to the girl, and his knees knocked together. He knew not what to do.

The czar glared at the girl like a tiger; she returned the gaze with an expression of deadly terror; and involuntarily every one in the room crowded to see the stranger who had produced such an effect on the dying emperor.

Then, on a sudden, a fearful shriek was heard, and the Princess Sergia Gallitzin was seen, with both hands to her head, staring at Nadia, as if spell-bound.

"The dead are returned to curse their murderers! Save me from her, Gorloff!" she cried, and fell to the floor in a dead faint.

Instantly there was a subdued commotion, and the face of Nicholas changed. The shock seemed temporarily to banish the pain, and he looked down at the elder princess with a strange look.

"So, I am finding it out at last," he said, in grating tones. "Oh, if I could but live one more year!"

He turned and pointed at Nadia, with a face convulsed with fury, while he shouted in broken accents:

"Gorloff, do you not see the traitress? Away with her! Do your duty, and finish your work."

Gorloff stepped forward and laid his hand on the princess.

"Nadia Gallitzin, I arrest you in the emperor's name," was all he said, when the czarevitch interposed:

"This lady is here under my protection, count."

"Who is czar?" croaked a harsh voice from the bed. "Beware of the sick lion, Alexander; for his paw is as heavy as ever."

"I obey your majesty," said the czarevitch, sadly.

"You do well, sir. Gorloff, take her away."

Then the cold, impassive minister of police took the poor persecuted princess by the arm and escorted her from the room, while the ladies crowded around Sergia and helped carry her away, still insensible.

The czar sunk back on his pillow, with a triumphant smile, looking weary and weak, but devoid of pain.

"The end is coming, messieurs," he said, in a more quiet and natural voice. "You will soon be welcoming Alexander the Second, and Nicholas will be in the Kremlin vaults. Now, leave me alone with my son. The time has come when Nicholas must give over the trust he has received from God to the next czar."

The dying czar spoke in a solemn voice, and the expression of his face had changed entirely. He beckoned to his son and wife to approach, and, for the first time in many a long year, embraced them both with the utmost tenderness. Then the courtiers filed slowly from the room, and father, mother and son were left together with the dying czar.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A STRANGE GATHERING.

LATE that night a strange scene was taking place in the old fortress of Cronstadt, that guards the entrance to the Neva. Without hovered a line of lights that told of the distant fleets of England and France keeping a sullen beleaguering watch over the fortress they did not dare to assault. Within, the sentry paced on the ramparts, and a general air of hushed, and yet eager expectancy marked the demeanor

of the garrison. In the very center of the range of batteries that composed the fortress stood a low, sturdy building, of gray granite, that had the appearance of immense strength, with a low but exceedingly wide dome, covering a large expanse of ground. Within, the building was one of the most dismal it is possible to conceive, being entirely unprovided with light, save from a small narrow door at one side, perfectly bare of furniture; an immense stone vault, with dome roof.

This gloomy building was known as the "great bomb-proof," and within its walls were gathered, on the night in question, a number of people, with whom we have been more or less acquainted in the course of this story.

Just as the clocks trembled on the stroke of midnight, the deep echo of a heavy gun boomed out over the sea, and a light which had been at the top of the tall flagstaff of the fortress came gliding down, till it rested at half-mast. Then, after a deep silence of about a minute, the answering boom of an eighty-pounder from the great battery at Cronstadt spoke out the news to the world that had been rumored all day:

The Czar Nicholas was dead.

In the great bomb-proof, a number of people looked at each other and uttered a deep sigh, as if a weight had been taken off the mind, when they heard the minute guns.

Prince Dolgoroucki, Prince Gallitzin, and General Cyprianoff were standing together there, talking to Captain Malcolm Livingstone, of the Vladimir, which saucy craft had, but a few days before, run into Cronstadt in the teeth of the British blockaders, even exchanging broadsides with a line-of-battle ship as she passed.

Around them were most of the officers of the numerous garrison, but one thing was noticeable about every man in the building. The light of hundreds of torches stuck in brackets in the wall, shone on a sacred emblem on every man's breast.

It was a cross of five stars, equidistant from each other; and a similar emblem glittered in the cape or helmet of every one in the bomb-proof.

The minute guns boomed at regular intervals for a long time, and Gallitzin observed, in a low tone:

"He has gone to his rest. Peace be to his ashes. Henceforth Russia is free, even if Sebastopol falls."

"Sebastopol must fall," said Cyprianoff, sadly. "Such a glorious defense deserves a better ending; but you will see, gentlemen, that it will be taken. Todleben himself admits that he can not hold out forever."

"And the new czar," said Dolgoroucki, doubtfully, "what will he do?"

"You will see to-night," said Gallitzin, proudly. "In a little while, or I mistake me much, he will be here. We are to hold a grand chapter to-night, and the czar—well, you will see."

Still the minute guns pealed out at regular intervals, and the time slipped by, while the buzz of conversation in the great bomb-proof was incessant.

Suddenly the guns of the great battery went off, in quick time, to the number of twenty-one, and a general exodus took place to the open air, and down to the quay.

A large steamer, lighted up with lanterns, came foaming up to the quay; and fort after fort thundered out its salute to the new czar, for the steamer was bringing him in.

Soon he stepped ashore, tall, handsome and gracious, already a delightful contrast to his iron father. The soldiers presented arms and cheered, the cannon thundered him a loud welcome, and Alexander the Second, czar of all the Russias, passed between the lines of troops, straight to the bomb-proof.

There, in a little while after, might be seen a solemn and august spectacle. Enthroned on a massive chair, and robed in pure white, a cross of five diamonds gleaming on his breast, the new czar took his seat as *Grand Master of the Brotherhood of the Starry Cross*. Around him gathered a throng of the ancient nobility of Russia, and officers of all grades, every one robed in a white mantle, and wearing the same symbol on the breast.

The same order which had been proscribed under Nicholas was seen to be the corner-stone of Alexander's throne; and then first one might see how wide had been the secret ramifications of that brotherhood which had frustrated the all-powerful minister of police. Men were there who had been high in Gorloff's confidence, inspectors, chief of bureaux, men of all ranks. No wonder that the minister had been check-mated.

A deep silence fell over the assembly as the Grand Master drew his sword, and struck three times on the table before him. The hitherto tumultuous assembly resolved itself into a silent, waiting crowd. Then the offices held by every one were for the first time discernible. Prince Gallitzin, with a large mace, stood by the czar's chair, as Grand Chancellor; Dolgoroucki, Cyprianoff, and a score of princes occupied the front rank as Grand Commanders, and a second line of Grand Companions was headed by the figure of the Russo-Yankee,

Captain Livingstone. The Brothers and Companions filled the rest of the building.

As soon as silence was obtained, the czar spoke in a clear voice:

"Brothers of the Starry Cross, at last we meet in public, doomed no more to hide our heads and crosses. Russia is free, and the czar wears the Cross of Stars. To-night we hold the first chapter, and to-night the stars of God look down upon us to see if we do justice. Brothers, we have suffered in the past. To-night shall see justice done, the good rewarded, and the wicked punished. Let the Grand Constable bring in the prisoners."

Out from the Grand Commanders stepped Cyprianoff, and he was followed by a number of the lower brothers, among whom the burly frame of Sergeant Potapoff was conspicuous.

Silence reigned in the hall while they were gone, and very soon they re-entered, guarding a knot of people, in the midst of whom towered two conspicuous figures, standing at least a head above the rest, and wearing the well-known British uniform. The tall bear-skin shako of the Coldstream Guards, and the nodding plumes of the piper of the Black Watch, were contrasted with the dark uniform of the late minister of police, Count Gorloff, and the gold lace adornments of Pichot, chasseur and ex-Zouave. But, besides those, there were two female figures, both of surpassing beauty; and one showed the magnificent proportions of the Princess Sergia Gallitzin, while the other looked out of the dark and mournful eyes of Nadia.

But whereas the elder princess was in the same full evening dress in which she had been arrested not an hour before, the beautiful Nadia was robed in the pure white mantle of the order that filled the hall, and on her breast glittered the five diamonds in the same cross that marked that of the czar.

Gorloff looked pale and desperate, Sergia haughty and defiant; Nadia seemed ineffably happy as she walked to her place among the Grand Companions, holding the hand of Ivan Cyprianoff.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE STAR'S GLORY.

"GRAND CHANCELLOR, arise," said the czar, solemnly. "Tell the brethren wherefore we are here to-night."

Then Gallitzin stepped forward and spoke.

"Worthy and Reverend Grand Master, and mighty czar, and you, oh, my brethren, hearken. A Grand Companion of our sacred order has been foully wronged by Alexis, Count Gorloff. I demand, most mighty czar and master, that Alexis, Count Gorloff, be made to stand in the prisoner's place, to answer the charges that I prefer against him before this Chapter of Knights, and before the czar of all the Russias."

"Let the Grand Constable place him there," said the czar, sternly.

The order was immediately executed, and Gorloff, pale as death, but collected and quiet, stood all alone in an empty space before the seat of the czar.

"Mighty czar and master," said Gallitzin, "I accuse Alexis, Count Gorloff, of having falsely informed the late czar that my daughter, Nadia Gallitzin, was trying to incite a revolt of the serfs, when she had no such intention, and had made no such attempt. That he procured, as a witness to this charge, by means as base as they were cowardly, the evidence of Nadia Gallitzin's stepmother, the woman whom I raised from a Gipsy dancer to a princess, and who repaid me by violating her vows and serving Gorloff's vile purpose. I charge him with having deceived the late Czar Nicholas, so that he procured an order sending the innocent Nadia to Siberia. Not content with that, he arrested her himself when she was out on a lonely ride, killed her horse and threw it into the Neva, and procured it to be rumored that the innocent girl was dead, to prevent my searching for her; and not only that, mighty czar, but when she was on her journey to the frontiers, this wretch offered her freedom on condition of becoming—think of it—his mistress. I charge him with this, and offer Sergia and Nadia Gallitzin to prove it true."

"Sergia Gallitzin, come forth," said the deep voice of the czar. "Did you swear to my father that your adopted daughter was guilty of treason?"

"I did," replied the princess, in a hard, defiant tone. She seemed to be reckless of everything since she had overcome the first access of terror, produced by Nadia's sudden reappearance, when she thought her dead.

"Wherefore did you so?" asked the czar.

Then the old, wild Gipsy nature broke the crust of politeness which education had brought over it.

"Because I hated her!" she cried, savagely. "I thought to be the first in my husband's heart, and I found this girl, the daughter of some strolling American actress, was before me always. I hated her, and I soon grew to hate him. She was always in my path; she loved the man I did, and he loved her; so I sold myself to Gorloff for revenge. Now do with me what you will. I have made her suffer, but I thought she

was dead. Gorloff told me she was, and I thought I was her murderer. Now it seems he lied to me about her, all through. It is good for you, Alexis Gallitzin, that I know it now, or tortures would not have opened my lips. I have wronged Nadia, but I am glad she is not murdered. Do with me as you like. I do not fear to die, as her ghost can not haunt me."

"It is well," said Alexander, calmly. "By your own confession you are a bad woman. The convent discipline of Troitzza will do you good. Take her away. Nadia Gallitzin, step forward."

As the elder princess was hurried away, the younger one stepped forward in her white robe, with the glittering cross on her breast.

"Nadia Gallitzin," said the czar, "you have heard the accusation against Count Gorloff. Tell us how far it is true, to your knowledge."

The girl spoke in a low, sweet voice, that was yet distinctly audible in the remotest parts of the building, so breathless was the interest of all in the story.

"Your majesty knows that it is now five years since my noble father thought fit to admit me, the only female in all Russia, to the privileges and duties of the Brotherhood of the Starry Cross. I had a certain humble talent of language, which I inherited from my American mother, and which was adjudged useful to the order. I became my father's private scribe, and was made a Grand Companion, that I might be able to communicate with the brethren all over Russia. In that station I traveled widely among the serfs, with my noble father, and gained their love; but I can truly swear to your majesty that I never for one moment thought of exciting a revolt. And yet it is true that I was arrested by Count Gorloff, as has been said, and hurried away to Siberia, without being allowed even to see my father, or let him know where I was. It is true that Count Gorloff pursued me with infamous proposals, threatening all kinds of vengeance on my father if I refused. Your majesty, I did refuse, and went to the mines, a prisoner, under the name of Anna Bronk, knowing that my dear father believed me dead. It was a hard trial, but, thank God, I found that the Starry Cross shone even in the wilds of Siberia. I found brothers and companions even among my guards, and with their help was enabled to escape, taking with me the only serf who had known me in former days, my father's groom, Demetri Sottikoff. He was with me when I was arrested, and from some caprice of kindness, Gorloff allowed him to remain with me. I took a sledge, and crossed the border into Turkestan, amid the snows of winter. Your majesty's self allowed me to escape, when I only knew you as Captain Blank, and to your majesty, who did not then know me save as a Starry Cross, I promised that Russia should not repent it. To be brief, I escaped to Turkey, where I was taken and sold as a slave to the sultan. I was confined in the seraglio, but who could hold a Russian maiden, intent on serving her country? Again I escaped, thanks to the help of four brave soldiers, three of whom are now here. Will your majesty allow them to advance, that I may tell what Russia owes them?"

The czar bowed, and the three old comrades, at a signal from the princess, advanced. They were all ignorant of what was passing, for the conversation was carried on in Russian, but Sandy whispered:

"Haud up her heids, laddies, they're claverin' aboon us."

"These brave men," continued Nadia, "risked their lives to save me from a Turkish harem. They did it from pure kindness of heart, and took me to Constantinople, where I was safe. The American ambassador there was a cousin of my poor dear dead mother, and from him I learned that my mother's only brother, Malcolm Livingstone, had lately entered the navy of Russia. America and Russia have always been friends, and I had plenty of money from the sale of the jewels I had taken away from the sultan's harem, and those I had worn when I was first arrested. I assumed the character of a Polish countess, met the French commanders, and managed to worm all their secrets from them. Then, under pretense of a yachting expedition, I sailed off in the Black Sea, and met my uncle Malcolm, cruising in the Vladimir. Through him I sent a full account of the allied plans to —, an officer in whom—"

She hesitated and turned scarlet. She had forgotten the sea of curious eyes gazing at her, and her courage faltered. Old Prince Gallitzin took up the story for her, surrounding her with his protecting arm.

"To her betrothed husband, General Count Ivan Cyprianoff, the nephew of my old friend Dolgoroucki. General Cyprianoff was the first person that knew that Nadia Gallitzin was alive. You all know, brethren, that a telegraph cable was laid by us from Moscow to the Crimea, hidden under the earth from the minister of police. The secret of the Starry Cross was well kept. Fearing that it might leak out at St. Petersburg, I had a branch line laid, terminating in a ruined church on my own estates. General Cyprianoff had the other end hidden in a ruined chapel by the Tchernaya river, outside the lines

of Sebastopol. But for the news that came over that line we are indebted to only one person, this delicate girl by my side, who, hunted like a wild beast by her own countrymen, and having every reason to take revenge, yet risked her life again and again to bring us news, now disguised as a French officer, now shot at by our own outposts as a spy.

"At last, at the battle of Inkerman, she was made a prisoner, in the disguise of a French officer, and it turned out that the same brave fellows who rescued her from the Turks had recognized and suspected her errand in the allied camp. Then first I heard where she was, and forbid her to expose her life again. I sent for her from General Cyprianoff, into whose hands she had luckily fallen, and for months I was compelled to hide my daughter on a lonely estate near Moscow, for the times were perilous. Gorloff's spies had found Cyprianoff's secret visits to the lonely chapel, and Gorloff himself penetrated in disguise to my own church at Beloi Gorod. But we cheated him, after all. I sent my two American operators away, buried all the apparatus, and left an empty church for the minister to hunt through. But now, thank God, we are under a czar who loves us, and therefore I say, what shall we do to punish Gorloff?"

"Let the accused answer," said the czar. "Is all this true? What have you to say why justice should not be done?"

"It is all true," said Gorloff, in a low tone. "I served the dead czar too well. I throw myself on the mercy of the new one."

"It is well," said Alexander. "Justice shall be done."

Justice was done. In the mines of Siberia the count learned the tortures to which he had subjected so many, while the guilty Sergia expiated, in a convent, all the sins of her time of splendor.

Ivan and Nadia were happily married, and Monsieur Pichot forgot, in the office of steward of their estates, that he had ever been a Frenchman.

Sandy, the piper, and Higgs, were graciously released by the czar, in consideration of their past services; but both had become so fond of Russia, that they entered the czar's dominions at the close of the war, and became retainers of Gallitzin, who purchased the discharge of both. Poor Paddy Carroll was killed at the Redan, or he would have gone too.

We all know what strides Russia has made since that time toward happiness and freedom, under the rule of Alexander, who has deservedly obtained from his people the same name that once belonged to his uncle, "The White Czar."

Secure in Russia's love and America's friendship, long may he flourish; and with that hope, dear readers, let us bid him farewell.

THE END.

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